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Security Council

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Thursday, 19 June 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Rice/Mr. Khalilzad	(United States of America)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Michel
	Burkina Faso	Mr. Bassole
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mrs. Kosor
	France	Ms. Yade
	Indonesia	Mr. Natalegawa
	Italy	Mr. Scotti
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Ettalhi
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Ms. Dlamini Zuma
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Baroness Scotland
	Viet Nam	Mr. Le Luong Minh

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Letter dated 4 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2008/364)

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08-39069 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Women and peace and security

Letter dated 4 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2008/364)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Ghana, Iceland, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Myanmar, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tonga, Tunisia and the United Republic of Tanzania, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend invitations under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly; Major-General Patrick Cammaert, former Division Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and His Excellency Mr. Yukio Takasu, Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Japan.

It is so decided.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 18 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa, in which he requests that His Excellency Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, be invited to participate in the consideration of the item in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Unless I hear any objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to His Excellency Mr. Lamamra.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite His Excellency Mr. Lamamra to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2008/403, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United Republic of Tanzania and the United States of America.

I should like to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2008/364, containing a letter dated 4 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I should like also to draw attention to document S/2008/402, containing a letter dated 16 June 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom transmitting the report of the Wilton Park conference, held from 27 to 29 May, on "Women targeted or affected by armed conflict: what role for military peacekeepers?".

With the forbearance of my colleagues, I would like to make introductory remarks on behalf of my country in my national capacity. As I hear no objection, I shall proceed; I promise to be brief.

Thank you all for joining us; I would especially like to thank the Secretary-General for his leadership. I should like to commend you, Mr. Secretary-General, for your commitment to increasing the number of women candidates for United Nations Special Representative and Special Envoy positions. When I, along with the members of the Women Leaders Working Group, first began looking at this issue, we realized that in the 60 years of United Nations peacekeeping, only seven women had held the post of Special Representative to the Secretary-General. You immediately took the lead in helping to address that, Mr. Secretary-General, and today Margrethe Løj of Denmark is now the Special Representative for Liberia. We applaud you for your commitment, and we look forward to working with you on that critical issue.

I also want to commend all of you here today, my fellow Council members, and I want to thank those who have travelled from afar to show their dedication to the important issue of ending the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as instruments of warfare. Rape is a crime that can never be condoned. Yet women and girls in conflict situations around the world have been subjected to widespread and deliberate acts of sexual violence. As many here are aware, for years there has been a debate about whether or not sexual violence against women is a security issue for this forum to address.

I am proud that today we can respond to that lingering question with a resounding "yes". This world body now acknowledges that sexual violence in conflict zones is, indeed, a security concern. We affirm that sexual violence profoundly affects not only the health and safety of women, but also the economic and social stability of their nations.

The draft resolution before us establishes a mechanism for bringing those atrocities to light. Specifically, the draft requests that the Secretary-General prepare an action plan for collecting information on the use of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and then report that information periodically to the Council.

We already know of the unimaginable brutality against women that exists in some parts of the world. In Burma, for instance, soldiers have regularly raped women and girls as young as 8 years old. I must note that what is also tragic in that country is that instead of being allowed to take the office of the elected leader of Burma's Government, Aung San Suu Kyi is marking her birthday this very day under house arrest. We cannot forget, as we examine that issue, other women activists who struggle for freedom in violent environments.

We are concerned about the issue of women affected by violence across the world, in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and many others.

As an international community, we have a special responsibility to punish perpetrators of sexual violence who are representatives of international organizations. Last year, there were reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers in several United Nations missions and by staff at the United Nations Mission in Liberia. The encouraging news is that steps have been taken to address that. One of the perpetrators is serving a sentence in his country, and several other cases remain under investigation. That situation should serve as a model for all countries contributing troops to United Nations operations. While the individual perpetrator is ultimately responsible for the abuse, Member States are responsible for disciplining and holding their troops accountable.

Finally, we must work together to provide the necessary protection and assistance to victims of sexual violence. In recent years, the United States has provided more than $40 million to protect women and girls in Darfur and to provide for sexual violence prevention in response projects worldwide. We have also addressed the issue of sexual violence by devoting $528 million over the last seven fiscal years to fighting human trafficking, another grave abuse of human dignity that is all too frequently committed against women and girls, especially in conflict situations.

One of the most important ways in which we must measure the value of our international community is by how effective we are in protecting, and providing justice for, the most vulnerable of our members. When women and girls are preyed upon and raped, the international community cannot be silent or inactive. It is our responsibility to be their advocates and their defenders. We are taking an important step today that will enable us better to meet that goal, and I want to thank you all for being here to show your strong support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers that they should limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I welcome in particular the participation today of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, and I invite him to take the floor.

The Secretary-General: I thank the United States for having taken the initiative to convene this important debate. I congratulate Secretary of State Rice for her leadership. It is critical that the Council devote its full attention to this issue. I look forward to hearing its views on the way forward.

Almost eight years after the Council adopted its landmark resolution 1325 (2000), an increasing and alarming number of women and girls are falling victim to sexual violence in conflict. Sexual violence poses a grave threat to women's security in fragile post-conflict countries and undermines efforts to cement peace. It strikes women who are already struggling to survive and to keep their families together in a generalized climate of fear. The breakdown of law and order makes women all the more vulnerable to attacks and leaves them with virtually no recourse to justice. Survivors are often so badly stigmatized that they can hardly even hope for a normal life. Cast out by their societies, they rarely seek redress. Even when they do have the courage to come forward despite the humiliation that that can bring, the justice system too often fails, and perpetrators go free. That fuels a culture of impunity that does nothing to discourage more attacks. So, the vicious circle rolls forward.

But we can and must push back. This March, I launched a global campaign to end violence against women. The aim is to tackle all of its manifestations, including the abominable practice of sexual violence in armed conflict. I will soon appoint a Messenger of Peace tasked entirely with advocacy for ending violence against women.

Around the world, United Nations peace missions are making a difference by monitoring the programme, helping the victims and advocating an end to impunity. The United Nations Mission in Liberia has built a safe house for survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. In Haiti, our peacekeepers are organizing meetings on women's rights for members of the judiciary and police. Our Rule of Law Unit in Afghanistan is helping the country draft legislation to eliminate violence against women. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has created a special unit to ensure that victims receive help when they seek justice.

All of those initiatives are based on Security Council mandates. When the Council adopts resolutions with strong language on sexual and gender-based violence, the United Nations can respond more forcefully. Let us ensure that all future mandates have clear provisions on protecting women and children in conflict situations. When the Council authorizes multidisciplinary missions, we can produce results. When Member States send us qualified female personnel, we can demonstrate the central role of women in restoring stability to war-ravaged countries.

The concept paper before the Council cites the all-female Indian civil police unit in Liberia as a possible model. I believe that successful initiative serves as an excellent example of the unique contribution that female personnel can make. Through their sheer presence, the members of that Indian contingent are showing Liberian women that they, too, can play a role in law enforcement. We have the numbers to prove it. Since the female Blue Berets were first deployed, there has been a marked increase in the number of women applying for jobs with the Liberian police.

I am eager to deploy more women worldwide, not just as police, military and civilian personnel, but also at the highest levels of mission leadership. Therefore, I need Member States to come forward with more women candidates. Send me your female troops, your police, your civilian personnel and your senior diplomats, and I will ensure that they all are considered, that qualified candidates are placed on rosters and that the maximum number are deployed to the field as quickly as humanly possible.

The troop-contributing countries are already moving in that direction, and I appreciate all of their contributions to United Nations peacekeeping. But at the same time, I urge them to do more to provide predeployment training for preventing and responding to sexual violence. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is revising its standardized materials on that project, and we look to the troop-contributing countries to help ensure that United Nations personnel are part of the solution and not the problem.

Let me be clear. The United Nations and I personally are profoundly committed to a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation or abuse by our own personnel. That means zero complacency. When we receive credible allegations, we ensure that they are looked into fully. That means zero impunity. When allegations are found to have merit, all personnel, whether military, police or civilian, are held accountable on the basis of the applicable national jurisdiction. I will strengthen the current code of conduct by upholding the strictest discipline, whereby not only the individual concerned but also supervisors up the chain of command are held accountable in a system of collective responsibility.

Violence against women has reached unspeakable and pandemic proportions in some societies attempting to recover from conflict. Responding to the silent war against women and girls requires leadership at the national level. National authorities need to take the initiative to build comprehensive strategies, while the United Nations needs to help build capacity and support national authorities and civil society.

Responding to calls from women's groups, rape survivors and non-governmental organizations, we are bringing together a dozen United Nations entities in a concerted effort called the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. The initiative brings together experts on issues such as peacekeeping, development, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, human rights, humanitarian relief and gender concerns to help stop rape and other sexual crimes in conflict-torn countries.

We know what it takes for a strategy to succeed. It takes awareness-raising. It takes effective security measures, including training for national military and police forces. It takes close monitoring of human rights, and it requires prosecuting all perpetrators to the full extent of the law.

At the same time, we must view this problem in the broader context of women's empowerment. That means revising not only laws that deal with violence, but also laws that affect women's rights with respect to other issues, such as poverty, inheritance or divorce. It means creating conditions where justice can flourish, because the best laws in the world will mean little if they are not enforced through strong judicial and penal systems.

Above all, we must do far more to involve women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations and recovery after the guns fall silent. We must have more women participating in the process of seeking justice, fostering reconciliation, supporting disarmament and demobilization, shaping development policies and rebuilding institutions. By creating a culture that punishes violence and elevates women to their rightful role, we can lay the foundation for lasting stability, where women are not victims of violence but agents of peace.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Olubanke King-Akerele, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia.

Mrs. King-Akerele (Liberia): I bring you warm greetings and felicitations from Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, the Government and the people of Liberia, who are exerting all of their collective energies, pride and national resources towards consolidating, nurturing and sustaining our hard-earned peace.

We would be remiss if we did not take this opportunity to express once again our deepest appreciation to the United Nations, our multilateral and bilateral partners, the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union for standing steadfastly with us through our darkest hour. Indeed, as we move ahead, those same partners are with us even now and continue to stand with us in partnership as we slowly but surely persist in building a society of sustained peace, stability, freedom, justice, economic recovery and prosperity.

We are here today to address the very serious issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, a matter that this body first addressed some eight years ago through the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000). What progress have we made since then? We are here to add the voice of my country in expressing the seriousness of this matter and to appeal to the collective conscience of the United Nations to move expeditiously in addressing this matter, which has a serious negative impact on our common humanity. Let us reflect for a moment on this.

In adopting that resolution, the Security Council recognized that protecting women and securing their engagement in peace processes dramatically increases the likelihood of success in peacemaking and peace consolidation.

Much remains to be done to implement the vision of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security so as to ensure that women are protected from the worst abuses in times of conflict and to empower them. The resolution requires accountability — a measurement mechanism; it needs benchmarks and targets for implementation, with institutional structures and focal points identified within the United Nations system dedicated specifically to resolution 1325 (2000), along the lines, perhaps, of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict.

Women continue to be raped and trafficked with impunity. Female genital mutilation is widespread. Injuries and the medical and psychological consequences of such violence, including depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, fistulas, HIV/AIDS infections and unwanted pregnancies, are often ignored.

In my own country, Liberia, widespread violence against women and girls continues to be a major concern. Rape remains at the top of the list of crimes reported to the Liberian National Police. The majority of rape cases reported involve children under the age of 18. Assessments carried out on the issue of rape and other forms of sexual violence have indicated that these are indeed embedded in cultural beliefs, practices and behaviours that will have to go.

The maternal mortality rate in Liberia is a source of great concern, as the latest data from the 2007 Liberian demographic survey reveals a significant increase in maternal mortality: from 528 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 994 per 100,000 live births in 2007. That alarming increase is the result of a lack of access to quality reproductive health services and information, as well as the scarcity of skilled birth attendants. Recent interviews conducted with 150 women and girls who sought treatment for fistulas at the fistula unit at John F. Kennedy Hospital in Monrovia, established with the support of the United Nations, revealed that 24 per cent of those women and girls had developed fistulas between the ages of 11 and 16 and 54 per cent between the ages of 17 and 20, and that 74 per cent of those who were married had been rejected by their community.

In response, the Government of Liberia established a special unit in the Ministry of Gender to address the increasing incidence of gender-based violence. Also, at the Ministry of Justice, in her annual message earlier this year to the National Legislature, President Johnson-Sirleaf sounded the alarm, noting that the number of incidents of rape involving young children continues to increase at an alarming rate. In her own words, "We must prosecute all such criminals without mercy. We must name and shame them. We must help parents to expose them." The Association of Female Lawyers is working with us in Liberia in that regard.

With the assistance of the United Nations family, we recently signed — last week, on 12 June — a two-year United Nations joint programme to address gender-based violence in the country using multidimensional and holistic approaches. We will need funding for this programme. We also introduced a rape law, enacted in early 2006. Adopted in November, the national plan of action on gender-based violence is also in the preparation stage.

With the support of the United Nations system, the Government will soon have a special court in the Temple of Justice that meets international standards and that is dedicated to the prosecution of sexual offences, including rape. This special court will undoubtedly contribute to responding to the backlog of sexual offences with which we are faced. It is time to tackle this item very seriously, as we are doing in Liberia. Together, with our partners, we are working assiduously in that regard. The issue of geographical accessibility and the other problems that confront us are being addressed.

Yet the challenges are enormous: restoring the rule of law, protecting human rights and ending impunity for crimes committed against the people of Liberia.

We are convinced that the situation of gender-based violence in Liberia is a microcosm of current conflict-ridden environments, as well as post-conflict environments.

At this point, we are indeed calling for fundamental changes if resolution 1325 (2000) is to be translated into effective action worldwide. We must review the progress made under that resolution, including field-based research on what has and has not worked in key situations. We must identify constraints, form partnerships, establish systematic funding and bring together advocates of the forceful implementation of the resolution.

We would like also to convey our special appreciation to the Secretary-General for having appointed a woman Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia in response to the resolution. We are working extremely well with her and with the United Nations system at large. Mr. Secretary-General, you mentioned the Indian special peacekeeping force. Indeed, it is having a significant effect in Liberia. We will be using that force as a model to encourage Liberians, and Liberian women in particular, to serve as peacekeepers worldwide. We are, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, within the context of the Foreign Service Institute, looking into how we can link up experiences with peacekeeping. We want to thank the system at large, as well as the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and the Assistant Secretary-General herself, for their support. Indeed, we have no alternative; we are morally obliged to support this draft resolution. We want to commend most highly the President of the Security Council for this initiative.

The President: I now give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Srgjan Kerim.

Mr. Kerim: May I begin by thanking Secretary Rice for having convened this important meeting on sexual violence in armed conflict situations. I would also like to express my gratitude to Ambassador Khalilzad for his invitation to address the Security Council today.

Today's debate focuses on a security issue that has deep social consequences. As Secretary Rice rightly pointed out in her introductory remarks, the effectiveness of national institutions should be measured by their ability to protect the most vulnerable members of society, particularly women and children. I would like to add, in the same context, that the effectiveness of international institutions should also be measured by the degree of protection they afford to the most vulnerable members of society — women and children — and that applies especially to the United Nations.

During the General Assembly thematic debate on human security, held in May, member States emphasized the importance of more effectively integrating human security perspectives into the peace and security work of the United Nations. That is particularly important as this year we are marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Comprehensive, integrated and people-centred solutions at the crossroads of security, development and human rights must be at the heart of our efforts to fight gender-based crimes against women and girls in conflict situations.

To that end, the Assembly adopted a groundbreaking resolution during that session urging all member States to take special measures to eliminate rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict situations. Among other measures, the resolution calls on the United Nations system to integrate programmes to eliminate violence against women throughout its work.

The Security Council took a principled view of some of those issues in 2000 by adopting resolution 1325 (2000), which, for the first time, specifically addressed the impact of war on women. It also acknowledged that women's contribution to conflict resolution had been undervalued and underutilized.

While some progress has been made in a number of areas covered by the resolution, several reviews have revealed that much stronger and more coordinated efforts are needed to fully implement its provisions.

We all have to do more to prevent human rights violations against women and girls in situations of armed conflict, to do more to punish the perpetrators and to end the impunity of those who commit war crimes.

Armed conflict has a disproportionately negative impact on women. Sexual violence against women is not only an affront to our human dignity but an inherent and grave threat to our human security. When it is authorized and perpetrated as an instrument of war, one cannot express in words the utter indecency of it.

It is my strong belief that women must be guaranteed equal and full participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes and be represented in the structures and institutions born of any peace dividend in order to ensure that it lasts.

The interconnected nature of the issues we are discussing today were highlighted at the General Assembly's recent high-level debate on human trafficking, which also considered aspects of sexual violence against women and girls. Our discussions illustrated that in many instances human trafficking for sexual exploitation is intrinsically linked with conflict situations. Human trafficking thrives against the backdrop of conflict, poverty and discrimination. Members of the General Assembly all committed themselves to do more to put the existing normative framework into practice globally.

I would also like to highlight the General Assembly's work on the rights of the child, which lead to the establishment of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the Security Council's working group on this issue, which demonstrates that together we can effectively tackle issues that span security and human rights.

It is clear that when the General Assembly and the Security Council take a principled stand and increase our visibility and coordination on cross-cutting issues, such as sexual violence in armed conflict situations, the overall effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations is strengthened.

I hope that we can continue to engage in a productive policy dialogue on this and other human security issues that affect our work and our common mission.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Let me join the Secretary-General in commending the United States for its initiative to convene this very important meeting. I want to pay special tribute to you, Madam President, for your leadership and commitment in this regard.

Under the guidance of the Secretary-General, the United Nations has been vigorously working to prevent sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Just last month, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), on behalf of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, to which the Secretary-General has referred, hosted a high-level conference on the role of military peacekeepers and others in responding to this scourge. A number of former Force Commanders participating in that conference conceded that more needs to be done to protect women and children from widespread and systematic sexual violence in conflict situations. We are taking measures, conscious of the challenge we are facing in addressing the problem. The conference agreed that the credibility of peacekeeping operations ought to be measured by how successful they are in this respect, and it reached broad agreement on the fact that the profound insecurity perpetuated by sexual violence must be addressed at the political and tactical levels.

The adoption in 2000 of resolution 1325 (2000) demonstrated that sexual violence in conflict is not just a gender issue; it is a fundamental security concern. And the fact that the Security Council is holding this meeting today sends another clear signal that sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is within the remit of the Council.

That fact is critical to improving our operational approach. When the Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo last December, it adopted strong language, setting a precedent for requiring specific responses to and reporting on sexual violence.

Gender units in most peacekeeping operations are working with key stakeholders, including uniformed peacekeeping personnel, national authorities, women's organizations and other sectors of civil society in efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence. All missions have underlined training as an important strategy to mobilize priority attention to this problem among peacekeeping personnel and national partners.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is undertaking numerous measures as well, including monitoring, investigating and documenting sexual and gender-based violence as a human rights issue.

These critical activities are part of our broader efforts to change attitudes to sexual and gender-based violence. This will require re-evaluating cultural practices and judicial systems to ensure that they are fully inclusive and that they guarantee the protection of women against all forms of abuse.

Sexual violence has not only grave physical, psychological and health consequences for its victims but also direct social consequences for communities and entire societies. Impunity for sexual violence committed during conflict perpetuates a tolerance of abuse against women and girls and leaves a damaging legacy by hindering national reconciliation.

Tackling this complex problem on all fronts will require the combined effort of all, including Governments, the United Nations System, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. In this regard, one of our greatest assets are women themselves. If we promote the full and equal participation of women in the security sector, we can ensure that security services effectively identify and respond to their needs.

The road ahead is long, but today's Council meeting is a crucial step forward. Let us maintain this forward momentum not only to protect women in conflict situations, but to secure lasting peace for all.

The President: I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Migiro for her leadership on this issue.

I shall now give the floor to former Division Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Major General Patrick Cammaert.

Major General Cammaert: First of all, I would like to thank Ambassador Khalilzad and the Security Council for inviting us here today and for taking the time to reflect on sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

My name is Patrick Cammaert. I retired last year as a major general after 39 years of service. My last job was general officer in command of the eastern division of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). I spent a large part of my military career operating in conflict zones, including the years I served with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

I have witnessed that violence directed at women and girls can be a particularly potent tool of war. Armed groups persecute communities by dehumanizing women and girls, which is considered to be an attack against the values or honour of a society. Even when a war is formally over and a United Nations peacekeeping force is deployed, women and girls remain targets for violence.

The current climate of impunity in most of the post-conflict contexts allows the many forms of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, to flourish. Often the political will to end the vicious cycle of impunity does not exist. Impunity thus remains an important impediment to the prevention of sexual violence.

It has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict. Testimonies of survivors of sexual violence reveal shocking brutality. Many of them suffer from grave long-term psychological and physical health consequences, including traumatic fistula and HIV. They remain disabled for life.

Survivors of sexual violence face enormous barriers in securing justice through the courts or through more informal, community-based mechanisms. Given the lack of adequate and responsive law enforcement, women in particular are reluctant to seek justice and to file complaints against attackers. Survivors usually prefer to suffer in silence, fearing stigma or ostracism. Today, several armed groups continue to use sexual violence as a weapon of war in Africa in various forms, including sexual slavery, kidnapping, forced prostitution and rape. The scale and brutality of the sexual violence faced by women and girls in armed conflicts amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Sexual violence must be perceived as a threat to peace and security in the entire world, and in Africa in particular.

The Security Council has an important role to play in fighting sexual violence against women and girls. The United Nations and the international community need to continue their campaigns to intensify actions to end violence against women and girls. Peacekeepers can play an important role in preventing and addressing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict zones.

It is important that the Council continue to provide modern and multidimensional United Nations peacekeeping missions with a mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.

Visible United Nations military presence on the ground proved to be effective in preventing sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Darfur.

To be effective in the protection of civilians, a United Nations peacekeeping force must have a clear mandate, strong rules of engagement, sufficient robust armament and well-trained and well-equipped troops. However, equally important is the willingness of United Nations commanders to take swift decisions when the presence of armed groups is reported.

The deployment of female military and police personnel has proven to be effective. A critical mass of women in peacekeeping missions can enhance confidence-building with the host community by presenting an organization that looks more like a civilian society than a military occupation force. Local women who already live in fear of men due to repeated sexual violence, often perpetrated by men in uniform, may feel more confident talking to other women.

You seated around this table are the United Nations, and you play an important role in ensuring that the United Nations and the international community continue to intensify actions to end violence against women and girls. We understand how many issues are before you at this moment, each needing great care and attention. However, woman and girls around the world are suffering. You have the responsibility to protect them and to take real and effective measures to put an end to this.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Jadranka Kosor, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of the Family, Veterans Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity of Croatia.

Mrs. Kosor (Croatia): Thank you, Madam Secretary of State, for presiding over this meeting today. I would also like to welcome the presence of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim and other distinguished colleagues around the table.

At the outset, Madam President, I wish to thank you and the United States presidency for the opportunity to discuss the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Croatia, as a country which has been exposed to the horrors of war, strongly believes that the Council must give its undivided attention to this phenomenon, which poses a serious threat to international peace and security.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence against women are heinous crimes that in past decades have often been used as a method of warfare. The existing culture of impunity must be overcome. Today, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Sudan and Somalia, and elsewhere, women continue to be targeted by warring parties during war and in post-conflict periods.

The Council had the opportunity to witness the plight of civilians, including women and girls, during its recent mission to Africa. Having been briefed by my ambassador, I am all the more certain that more needs to be done by all of us in order to find justice and a decent life for victims of conflict.

The use of sexual violence creates an atmosphere of insecurity and helplessness, with devastating effects. The number of girls in school continues to fall and women and girls are exposed to HIV/AIDS and are stigmatized in their communities. The persistence of rape in situations of armed conflict is a sad reminder of our obvious failure to provide security and protection to women and girls in conflict and post-conflict countries.

Speaking from the experience of Croatia, it would be remiss of me not to mention what we, Croatian citizens, have witnessed of this heinous practice. Even on Croatian territory, in the heart of Europe, rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror during the aggression to which Croatia was exposed at the beginning of 1990s. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been tormented by the same source of aggression, suffered the use of rape and sexual violence as an instrument of ethnic cleansing.

I therefore believe it is my obligation to warn the Council that these crimes must never — I repeat: never — escape the arm of justice. For this reason, the International Criminal Court at The Hague, as well as local courts, must be the last instance of justice for the victims and a reminder that there can be no tolerance for the crime of rape.

We are aware that the response of national communities in conflict areas to sexual violence against women and girls has been inadequate. Combating sexual violence requires well-planned preventive measures at a national and international level. We are of the view that Governments should ensure the participation of women from the early stages of negotiating peace and in reconstruction efforts. Women must also be given the possibility of being elected to political office, while support mechanisms for newly elected women must be ensured.

However, without ensuring women's physical safety and economic security through social norms, efforts to engage them in decision-making processes will not succeed. Due to a lack of such norms, we have witnessed the assassination of many women human rights defenders worldwide.

My delegation would also like to reiterate the commitments set out in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (General Assembly resolution 60/1) as well as in Security Council resolution 1674 (2006). Peacekeeping missions must have strong, clear and goal-oriented mandates, including the authorization to use force if necessary to protect civilians.

In this context, Croatia strongly condemns all acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by all categories of personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations. We call upon all troop-contributing countries to take preventive measures, including predeployment awareness training, and to investigate and prosecute all perpetrators of sexual violence.

In the framework of its commitment to international peace and stability, Croatia is increasingly involved in contributing to international peacekeeping missions, currently 15 in all. Moreover, Croatia has specific guidelines that regulate its participation in peacekeeping operations. We are strongly committed to a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation by peacekeeping personnel.

Woman's role in peacekeeping is unique, prompting an increasing demand for its presence. It is our policy to deploy women to missions, either as members of the Croatian armed forces or the Croatian police. Women have been engaged on a range of issues where the female point of view or their presence makes a difference, including providing support for civil society or addressing problems of family violence.

Allow me now to inform the Council about progress achieved at the national level. Following our election as a non-permanent member to the Security Council for the period 2008-2009, we are ready to take a proactive role in the promotion of the initiative of safeguarding women's right in conflict situations and strengthening women's role in post-conflict peacebuilding. Furthermore, through our national policy for the promotion of gender equality, special measures for achieving the integration of the gender perspective in national security policy and the promotion of resolution 1325 (2000) are being implemented.

Also, as a example of good practice between the Government and the non-governmental sector, I would like to mention that the Government Office for Gender Equality has given support to the non-governmental organization project on women's experiences of war, entitled "Women recollecting memories: the gender dimension".

At the regional level, we would like in particular to stress the experience we gained in wartime. As is known, among the refugee population more than 50 per cent of the people are women and girls. In July 1992, Croatia was hosting 341,000 refugees, among whom 80 per cent were women, children and elderly people. Croatia provided for all shelter and food, as well as providing temporary protection status and medical insurance. Assistance from specialized agencies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF was valuable. As a consequence of war atrocities, we in Croatia still host 1,600 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Croatia is a part of a region that in the recent past has suffered as a result of armed conflict. We are fully aware of the role that both the Security Council and the international community can play in addressing sexual violence against women and girls, especially when this is used by political or military leaders as a means of achieving political or military objectives.

We believe that the Security Council needs to provide strong and effective leadership on this issue, including by taking concrete action when necessary, with the ultimate aim of eradicating this abhorrent behaviour.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa.

Ms. Dlamini Zuma (South Africa): We commend the United States for organizing this open thematic debate on sexual violence in conflict situations, and we thank Secretary Rice for presiding over the meeting today.

Since its creation, the United Nations has grappled with the issue of sexual violence committed against women and girls in conflict situations. As a result, an international framework specific to women and girls was established and strengthened over time to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, including sexual violence in armed conflict. But, of course, we recognize that violence against women, including rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and many other forms of sexual violence, still remains today. Sexual violence constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity when committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack on a civilian population by State or non-State actors. It was for this reason that, when the International Criminal Court was created, South Africa recommended that sexual violence be among the crimes to be referred to the Court, which is a tool against impunity.

Yet, despite these milestones, more work still needs to be done to support and protect women and girls in conflict and post-conflict societies. Women and girls continue to make up a disproportionate number of the victims in situations of armed conflict. Those who survive conflict are traumatized, stigmatized and victimized yet again, just because they are women. As a result, women and girls are afraid to speak out about their ordeal or even to believe that there could be any recourse for their suffering.

The silence around sexual violence in conflict situations must be broken. During South Africa's presidency of the Council in March 2007, we adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2007/5) expressing the need for specific measures to be taken to ensure protection against sexual violence and to put an end to impunity. We further recognized that, while the situation of women and girls, particularly in conflict areas, remains desperate and unacceptable, the silence around sexual violence can be broken when we resist seeing women and girls as passive victims. While women may be the first casualties of war, they remain active agents of change and play a meaningful role in the recovery and reintegration of their families and communities. Where women are policymakers , they have been instrumental in bringing about democracy and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Sexual violence in conflict situations is inextricably linked to gender inequality, and we therefore need to advocate more strongly for the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. In that regard, Member States must continually look at measures to strengthen full and effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), particularly by forming partnerships with civil society, the private sector and community-based organizations.

Equally important is the need to ensure that the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations include clear guidelines for the protection of civilians from sexual violence. Gender-sensitive training, the deployment of more women peacekeepers and the appointment of more women special representatives and envoys of the Secretary-General should be implemented. There is practical evidence that the deployment of women enhances the impact of peacekeeping, especially for women and children in conflict areas. The deployment of women facilitates engagement with local women through the setting up of women's desks in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees, which assist women to talk about their needs and traumas, including information-sharing on sexual harassment, abuse and rape.

Furthermore, the presence of women peacekeepers has a positive transformational impact in terms of redefining the roles that women can play in all aspects of peace processes and of national reconstruction and development. South Africa is proud of its contribution to the representation of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa, which is rooted in our mainstreaming of gender and human rights in predeployment training.

The security sector of conflict and post-conflict countries must be reformed to prevent and better respond to sexual violence. In order to build effective, non-discriminatory and representative security institutions, it is essential to provide personnel with effective and sustainable gender training and capacity-building. Women's access to justice and their participation in the legal system would also contribute meaningfully to a well-functioning and gender-sensitive security framework.

We are pleased that the United Nations system has become more coordinated in its efforts to address all forms of violence, including sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflict. A better-coordinated United Nations system would ensure that adequate information collection and management systems would be in place in conflict situations to collect data on sexual violence and feed it to the Secretary-General.

Finally, we note with satisfaction that the draft resolution before us reaffirms the primary responsibility of the international community to ensure that adequate resources are made available to address the immediate and long-term needs of women and girls who have endured sexual violence. Perhaps even more important, the draft resolution reaffirms the implementation of the obligations of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols to both conventions, aimed at addressing discrimination against women and girls.

We must work for a non-discriminatory and non-sexist society in which all women and girls are treated as equal citizens. The end of discrimination against women will go a long way towards addressing the root causes of sexual violence. This is the least we can do for women and girls everywhere.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Djibrill Yipènè Bassole, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso.

Mr. Bassole (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): Violence against women in areas of conflict is continuing, in spite of the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) and all other relevant instruments. The phenomenon is worsening, becoming systematic and a genuine war strategy for some combatants. Victimized women and girls are deliberately targeted for abominable acts of violence. That is an unacceptable violation of the most fundamental human rights — in other words, a crime against humanity. Unfortunately, it seems that our repeated calls and recommendations have yet to be heeded.

Sexual violence in conflict zones highlights the vulnerability of young girls and women. That is especially true in certain parts of Africa where certain sociological factors continue to hinder their emancipation. When the violence itself does not outright kill the victims, its consequences take a heavy toll, leading to physical and psychological trauma, unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. How, then, can we effectively combat those degrading practices and ensure that women are better protected against such atrocities?

First of all, we must work to prevent conflict. We must make every effort to ensure that democracy and the rule of law take root, as well as to promote good governance and effective development policies. We must also devote resources to educating women and young girls. Education and training are the primary tools we must give them to help them empower themselves and participate in every aspect of the social, political and economic arenas, including even the military.

If conflict does erupt, several actions must follow. In particular, the Council must have at its disposal precise, relevant and credible information about the nature of the violence in all its aspects, including information about those who planned and carried it out. Moreover, justice must be done when it comes to prosecuting and punishing perpetrators. There must be absolutely no impunity when it comes to this issue.

Other complementary actions must also be taken at the social level. We must make sure that in situations of conflict, women and children, who are usually left to fend for themselves, are protected by peacekeeping operations.

In conclusion, I should like to welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General and of the United Nations system to combat this scourge. Lastly, I would like to thank and congratulate you personally, Madam President, for your leadership, as well as for having made it possible for the Security Council to deliberate this morning on this important issue.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Patricia Scotland, Baroness Scotland of Asthal and Attorney General for England and Wales of the Government of the United Kingdom.

Baroness Scotland (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the leadership shown by the United States in holding this debate during its presidency of the Council. Your presence here today, Madam President, demonstrates just how important it is for us all to tackle the growing problem of sexual and gender-based violence if we are serious about resolving conflict. I rejoice at the sight and the fact that of the 20 representatives around the Council table, seven are women, who are here to add their voice to the wise counsel given by their male counterparts and colleagues, adding substance and support to the draft resolution before the Council, which focuses on the plight of women caught in the pernicious tentacles of conflict.

May I also commend the Secretary-General for his vision and for his determination to increase the number of women who will be able to make their contribution to the Council's work and the reduction of conflict.

Before I turn to the issue of sexual violence, I would like to say a few words about Aung San Suu Kyi, who, as you rightly reminded us, Madam President, today spends a further birthday under house arrest. The Burmese people have suffered under military rule since 1962. It is fitting that we remember Aung San Suu Kyi as we talk about women, peace and security in today's debate, and remember, too, the many ordinary women of Burma, who have often borne the brunt of the violence, persecution and economic deprivation imposed upon them by the military Government. We call for Aung San Suu Kyi to be released immediately and for her to be allowed to play full part in Burma's political process.

In conflict, women and children suffer disproportionately. Sexual violence is among the very worst of the atrocities that they face, and it is increasingly being used as a deliberate method of warfare. Every day we hear reports from the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the media — and most recently from the International Criminal Court — about the systematic use of sexual violence to terrorize civilian communities and populations, to drive forward ethnic cleansing and to destroy communities. We have seen it in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the ex-genocidaires from Rwanda are primarily responsible. We see it in Darfur, in Somalia and elsewhere. In Zimbabwe, the hired thugs of Mugabe's regime brutalize and murder the wives and children of leaders of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. Only yesterday, the wife of the newly elected mayor of Harare was savagely beaten and killed by the so-called war veterans, in order to intimidate the opposition party in next week's elections.

In all those places we see the physical and psychological scars of the survivors of sexual violence and, chillingly, the silent testimony of the horribly disfigured bodies of those who did not survive. And we see the empty, burned-out villages from which the population has fled to avoid further attacks. And that is the point. The trauma and injuries caused by sexual violence are designed to cripple communities, trigger revenge attacks and cause lasting bitterness. In that way, gender-based violence feeds the fires of conflicts that the Council is dedicated to extinguishing.

But some, of course, will say, what is new about this? After all, it is true that rape and sexual violence have been associated with conflict since before records began to be kept. Three things have changed. First, sexual violence is now being used as a tool of warfare, rather than it being just a tragic by-product of conflict, and it is taking place on a much larger scale than we have seen before. Secondly, we now better understand how sexual violence damages the prospects of post-conflict recovery. And, thirdly and perhaps most important, we have the means to tackle this problem within our reach.

Resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and resolution 1674 (2006), on the protection of civilians, have provided an important foundation. Many nations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are doing valuable work to tackle sexual violence.

But sexual and gender-based violence is evolving, and the Council's response must also evolve. My Government believes that the Security Council should show leadership on the issue of sexual violence, first, by recognizing that widespread and systematic sexual violence can pose a threat to international peace and security. Secondly, the Council shall ensure that we provide for women's participation in all processes relevant to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The proliferation of sexual violence against women is, in part, aimed at excluding and marginalizing women's roles in society and in rebuilding communities. We have to correct that.

Thirdly, the Council should propose practical measures that parties to armed conflict can take to prevent sexual violence and ensure that those who commit such crimes are brought to justice. That includes peacekeepers as well as belligerents. Fourthly, but not least, the Council should require regular updates about sexual violence in situations of armed conflict so that we can better understand how to prevent it.

We are realistic. Sexual violence will, sadly, not go away overnight. But resolution 1325 (2000) is a crucial building block to tackling that growing problem. The civil populations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur, Somalia, Zimbabwe and elsewhere need the Council's continued efforts to tackle the growing scourge. The United Kingdom support the draft resolution before the Council in document S/2008/403 without reservation. We thank you, Madam President, and all those around this table who have lent their voice to that end.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Charles Michel, Minister of Development Cooperation of Belgium, to take the floor.

Mr. Michel (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by joining with those who have welcomed the initiative to hold this debate in the Security Council. I think it is both fundamental and urgent to speak out to express our indignation, to speak out to express our disgust at these tragedies within tragedies. The stories that we are hearing show that we are going beyond the borders of humanity. It is behaviour that is more bestial in nature than anything else. Like others here, I have had the opportunity to meet with victims — women, small girls — who have been affected by those atrocities.

It is a question of peace and security, Madam President, as you yourself rightly said at the outset. It is our conviction that this issue also involves our concept both of the human being and of humanity; our joint responsibility through a debate of this kind is to conduct our fight at the highest political level to deal with the unacceptable phenomenon of sexual violence in armed conflict.

I should like to divide my comments into three points: prevention; assistance to victims; and the fight against impunity.

Others have already referred to prevention. Obviously, war and a lack of security create horror and dread. Above all, we are fighting war against war. That is key in preventing this kind of violence and in mobilizing our will. We need to engage in enormous prevention work and awareness-raising work in areas at risk, the conflict areas. That is indispensable. Also, it can be seen in the field that there is a danger of such violence becoming viewed as commonplace, and then being exported beyond the areas that are directly affected by conflicts, into post-conflict situations. We have to be alert to that.

The second element is assistance to victims. Behind the statistics printed on glossy paper, there are tens of thousands of women, tens of thousands of young girls, whose lives have been affected in their very flesh and in their minds for the rest of their lives. There are families who have been dismantled, torn apart, torn to pieces by those horrific events. We have the responsibility to act to meet the medical needs, the social and psychological needs and the need for legal assistance, and to provide assistance to families and others to those near them. We must commit ourselves to reintegrating them into society, into economic life. Reports from the field lead me to believe that the extreme urgency of radically improving the coordination of international aid is a determining factor. We have to get closer to the victims in the field. We cannot simply content ourselves with a humanitarian presence in a few major centres. I believe that this is a very specific and important issue.

The last point, and probably the most important, is the fight against impunity. To punish the perpetrators is the task of the justice system. This fight requires the rejection of inevitability, the condemnation of letting these crimes become commonplace and the rehabilitation of the victims. That is the best way to engage in prevention. Every combatant, every fighter, every potential perpetrator needs to know that one day he will be called to account and will pay the price for his infamous crimes.

To be sure, the task is immense and complex. There are several aspects to our response. We must strengthen national judicial capacity. We must therefore have the commitment of national Governments to assume their responsibilities. Punishments must be decided upon, and they must be carried out. Recently, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, prisoners were able to escape shortly after their sentencing. That is not acceptable. We must have strengthened cooperation in that area. We also need to support an international response in the judicial sphere. Belgium is gratified at having been able, together with others, to set up the International Criminal Court, whose statute is unequivocal about the nature of these crimes.

In conclusion, I would like to argue on two particular elements. First of all, we have to mobilize our efforts to make the International Criminal Court more accessible to victims. I would like to draw attention to the strengthened role that could and should be played by the Trust Fund for Victims. It must be effective and must meet the needs of victims where other initiatives are lacking. In that context, I would like to encourage the Executive Director and the Board of Directors of the Fund not to hesitate to appeal for specific contributions where the situation so justifies.

The second element — and this perhaps complements the Secretary-General's initiative to designate a messenger for peace, of which he spoke earlier — relates to documenting the magnitude of this phenomenon, its roots, its evolution and the preparations for the work that must be done by the courts, whether national or international. Here, I would like to suggest that the Secretary-General might appoint a woman special investigator on sexual violence in armed conflict to carry out the systematic collection of information and to gather all the material that is already available in the field, whether from peacekeeping operations, the United Nations agencies or others operating in the field. All of this should lead us towards zero impunity, and we must clearly affirm the United Nations commitment to peace and security. That must be translated into efforts to tirelessly and determinedly hunt down the perpetrators of these crimes so that those monsters will never again be able to sleep in peace.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Rama Yade, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights of France.

Ms. Yade (France) (*spoke in French*): The history of men has long been the history of their violence. In that intermarriage of blood and history, the war of men has all too often also been the story of violence against women.

This year, we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which drew its inspiration from one man and one woman, one Frenchman and one American woman, René Cassin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Before man's baffling and barbaric violence, before such inhuman acts, the Declaration affirms the inviolable dignity of human beings, of men and women. That is the principle that we are reaffirming today in this public debate on sexual violence in armed conflict, and I thank you, Madam Secretary of State, for taking the initiative of holding this meeting.

Doubts have at times been raised: should a debate on the issue of sexual violence in armed conflict be included on the agenda of the Security Council, which debates issues of peace and war? For France, that debate has been decided. One cannot establish peace while remaining silent on the subject of rape and the violence done to women.

While such violence has, in the recent past and even today, reached shocking levels — in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Sudan — and while entire populations are being hunted down and massacred, we continue to witness the unbearable procession of mutilated and sexually tortured women and hear the endless and appalling litany of eyewitness testimonies, which sear our conscience. When sexual violence becomes a weapon of war, when rape is carried out in a planned and systematic campaign of terror and subjection, our Council is right to intervene. Not to do so would be a crime against conscience. We must act urgently.

The figures alone do not give the complete picture of the terror and horror that each violated and battered woman experiences in her innermost being, but they do, in their grim tally, show the extent of the tragedy.

I have just returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where I travelled to the Kivus. In 2007, over a period of six months, nearly 30,000 women were raped in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I met several of them in Bukavu and Goma. I listened to their raw, tragic stories, from which any trace of humanity seemed to have been erased. The testimonies are unbearable. One's spirit is overwhelmed with pain.

One of the women I spoke with was a 15-year-old girl from a village near Bukavu. She had been in Panzi hospital for several months. She had gone out to buy bread when several armed attackers fell upon her. She was raped by several of them in front of her family. They then took her with them into the woods, where for several months she was gang-raped, until she became pregnant and was infected with AIDS. After being kidnapped and brutalized a second time, she returned with a second child. Her life has been destroyed, especially since her family and community have ostracized her. That young girl is afraid to go home because she is afraid that the army could capture her again and the same thing would happen again.

When I saw those women and their distress, I wanted to let them know what we, the international community, are doing about this. In terms of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), for example, which is the largest United Nations presence in the world, those women are asking: what good is that presence to us, when we continue to be kidnapped and raped? I spoke about the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which has brought about the arrest of Jean-Pierre Bemba. These women who had been raped welcomed that news, but asked: why are the armed groups still at large? You see, the 200,000 women who have been raped in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are expecting more concrete and timely results. They are asking me to present their petition to you. We must therefore take action. What can we do? For the Congolese women, the answers are simple.

First of all, we must disarm the armed groups and put an end to the illegal trafficking that provides them with weapons. Secondly, we must ensure that those armed groups are kept away from the Kivus, so that they do not cross paths with their victims again. Thirdly, we must make sure that they are punished, so that impunity does not encourage other men to rape, knowing that they will never be punished. We must also find work for those who have not yet become criminals. That is what Congolese women are proposing. It sounds simple, but it is crucial. Let us therefore heed their cry.

What have we done so far? As there is no peace without justice, we welcome the progress achieved in the field of international justice, which has made sexual violence a crime against humanity and, in some cases, an act of genocide. France also welcomes in that regard the investigation that has just been opened by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court into the atrocities committed in the Central African Republic, including sexual violence on a massive scale. By charging Jean-Pierre Bemba with acts of rape that constitute, by their magnitude, war crimes and crimes against humanity, the International Criminal Court sent a strong signal to perpetrators of such crimes. Any perpetrator of such crimes, regardless of rank, will have to answer for his actions.

At the political level, the post of Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences was established in 1994. That mechanism has played a significant role in sounding the alarm and increasing awareness. That is why I wish to pay tribute to the work of the current Special Rapporteur, Ms. Erturk. We also welcome the work of the United Nations to increase awareness on the issue and the remarkable work of non-governmental organizations on the ground.

All of that, however, is not enough, and we must scale up international mobilization efforts. First of all, as I said, we must intensify the fight against impunity more than ever before. That is how we will be able to bring peace and redress to the victims. Without real punishment, there will be no prevention or deterrence.

Of equal importance is the need to include a detailed examination of the issue of sexual violence in reports by peacekeeping operations and in a comprehensive report of the Secretary-General. We need detailed information on this scourge in order to methodically attack the issue, particularly by integrating the consideration of this question in peacekeeping mandates, based on the example set by MONUC. Of course, we must make sure that peacekeeping forces themselves set the example

Finally, we must strengthen the practical implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). There will be no effective fight against sexual violence if women are not represented in sufficient numbers in peacekeeping operations, in security forces such as the army and police, and among the ranks of judges in States directly affected by those crimes.

Forty per cent of women raped in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are minors. With that knowledge, we believe that we should take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflicts, expanding its mandate to include sexual violence perpetrated against children, regardless of whether or not there are child soldiers in the country in question. We must also continue to develop victim treatment programmes and strengthen rehabilitation services, while working with local communities so as to avoid stigmatization of the victims.

Lastly, the European Union will continue to make this issue a priority. That is why France will seek the adoption of guidelines on violence against women, including sexual violence, during its European Union presidency, which begins on 1 July. Such guidelines will enable our embassies to take action and to directly finance rehabilitation programmes.

I am hoping that a robust resolution, incorporating as many of our suggestions as possible, will be adopted after this debate. Sexual violence, in particular rape, is unacceptable, whether it takes place today or tomorrow, no matter who commits it or what continent it is committed. That is my profound conviction, and I have no doubt that everyone in this Chamber shares it.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vincenzo Scotti, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Italy.

Mr. Scotti (Italy): First of all, allow me to fully align myself with the statement that will be delivered by Slovenia in its capacity as President of the European Union.

The issues that we are addressing today — women and peace and security — deserve the international community's utmost attention and unequivocal support. I will therefore begin by stressing Italy's commitment to the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which provides a comprehensive framework for addressing every aspect of the relationship between women and peace and security. It recognizes a key concept that should guide all of our actions in this field: women cannot be protected unless their participation at the decision-making level in all peace and reconciliation processes is ensured. At the same time, the protection of women from the violence of war is a necessary step towards empowering them to participate in the rebuilding of their societies.

Our success in implementing resolution 1325 (2000) must be judged on the basis of the improvements that we have already secured relating to the status of women. In our opinion, only one conclusion can be drawn: not enough has been done. Hence our conviction that the time has come to identify achievable and specific goals, without losing sight of the general picture.

From this perspective, countering the unspeakable horrors resulting from the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is a clear priority. I am therefore particularly grateful to the Government of the United States of America and to you, Madam President, for having organized today's open debate and for having submitted the draft resolution that will be adopted later and that Italy is honoured to co-sponsor.

The situation before us is appalling: 70 per cent of the casualties in recent conflicts have been civilians or non-combatants — most of them women and children. Women's bodies have been increasingly targeted during conflicts. Evidence shows that in many cases this represents a deliberate method of warfare and, sadly, a particularly devastating one. Rape and sexual violence are used to achieve political and military aims; to dominate, terrify and humiliate opponents; and to uproot communities and ethnic groups, thus contributing to the collapse of entire societies for generations to come.

Concrete information and precise evidence is, unfortunately, hard to come by, since the victims are often unreasonably and unacceptably stigmatized and too traumatized to come forward and denounce the violence to which they have been subjected. Nevertheless, what we do know is truly appalling: millions of women and girls have been raped, gang-raped, sexually tortured and abused, often in particularly atrocious ways.

From that perspective, the link between sexual violence and the maintenance of peace and security becomes evident; it demands immediate action by the international community and is therefore very much the business of the Council. All mandates for United Nations missions should ensure that whenever and wherever the United Nations is in the field — be it in peacekeeping or humanitarian operations — its staff is trained to prevent, recognize and respond to sexual violence. A collection and analysis of existing best practices could be an important exercise, leading, hopefully, to the formulation of a United Nations doctrine that sets training standards for all military and police personnel deployed by the Organization.

The Council's demand in today's draft resolution is clear: all parties to armed conflict must immediately cease all acts of sexual violence and take special measures to protect women and girls. The Council will have to follow up its demands by monitoring the parties' implementation of those obligations. Accountability is a key element. We have to identify the parties that continue to use sexual violence as a tactic of war, and we must build on the example set by resolution 1807 (2008).

We therefore need an efficient system to gather accurate information. We hope that the report requested in the draft resolution will meet this need. We also need to fight impunity for such acts, defined as a crime against humanity and a war crime by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We must devote more time and resources to strengthening the activities of national and international tribunals, including in post-conflict situations, to building a gender-sensitive transitional justice system and a gender-sensitive security sector.

In this regard, I am very pleased to announce that Italy is in the process of disbursing a specific contribution of €1 million to fund a United Nations Development Fund for Women programme on resolution 1325 (2000) in Liberia, in addition to several other initiatives that it has financed in recent years.

Today's resolution will be a major step forward, much like resolution 1325 (2000) was eight years ago. The Security Council has the moral and legal responsibility to send a clear message to the international community that it is determined to put an end to this scourge; to the perpetrators of crimes against women that they will no longer go unpunished; and to women that they will no longer be the victims of armed conflict, but rather the main agents of life and peace in their societies.

The President: I invite Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Special Envoy of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, to take the floor.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to thank Ms. Rice, Secretary of State of the United States of America, for having come to New York to preside over today's meeting. I am participating in this discussion on behalf of Yang Jiechi, Minister for Foreign Affairs. At the outset, please allow me to convey to Ms. Rice the Minister's cordial greetings. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Mr. Kerim, President of the General Assembly, for their statements.

Nearly eight years have passed since the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000), which constitutes a basis for cooperation among all the parties concerned in the area of women and peace and security. However, given the changing features of conflicts and the various complex and cross-cutting factors involved, the resolution has yet to be implemented fully. In the many conflicts under way today, women continue to be the most direct victims, and violence against women remains an extremely grave concern.

China condemns all violence against women, including acts of sexual violence, and urges all parties involved in conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law. We call upon the Governments concerned to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for crimes against women. China urges all countries that have not done so to take measures aimed at an early accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We support the Secretary-General in his pursuit of the policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation committed by peacekeepers, and we hope that the troop-contributing countries will step up the training and monitoring of their peacekeepers, so that the relevant United Nations code of conduct can be complied with and implemented.

On this occasion, I wish to emphasize the following points in relation to the protection of women in armed conflict.

First, while the Security Council has a unique role to play in response to violence against women, United Nations organs and agencies should strengthen their coordination and cooperation. The issue of sexual violence in conflict is closely related to that of armed conflict itself. As the Security Council bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council should focus its efforts on the prevention of conflict, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. Sexual violence should be addressed through a comprehensive approach in the context of the peace process and the political situation. It should not be treated as a stand-alone issue; nor should attention be given to its symptoms only. In addition, the Security Council should enhance its consultation with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat and the relevant treaty bodies in a joint effort to address violence against women.

Secondly, national Governments bear primary responsibility for the protection of women. The international community should provide substantial support and assistance. The responsibility for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and for the protection of women lies first and foremost with the Governments concerned. However, countries in conflict and those emerging from conflict are often beset with difficulties and thus require generous contributions from the international community to help them build their capacity. Meanwhile, external assistance should be provided in compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, respecting the will of the country in question and avoiding any undermining of its sovereignty.

Thirdly, the participation of women in every stage of the peace process should be enhanced. Their status and role should receive greater attention. Respecting and protecting women is the hallmark of a civilized society and of social progress. It is also an important element of a mature social system. Respect for and protection of women's rights should be mainstreamed throughout the peace process. Their special needs and concerns should be accommodated. Women should be further empowered to participate and to make decisions that concern them. In recent years, we have witnessed a great number of positive measures taken by the Secretariat to increase the ratio of women in senior positions, at the head of peacekeeping missions and in the staff in general. More efforts are needed in this direction in the future.

Fourthly, civil society should continue to be encouraged to join the efforts to protect women. Many of our colleagues in the non-governmental organization (NGO) community deserve our appreciation for the work they have carried out in the field to protect the rights and interests of women under difficult circumstances. China supports the constructive role that NGOs continue to play in the protection of women in armed conflict and encourages them to increase their communication with United Nations agencies, especially those with a special mandate on women's issues, and to offer proposals in this area.

We are pleased to note that, under the personal guidance of Secretary of State Rice, the United States delegation has submitted a draft resolution under this agenda item on elimination of all forms of sexual violence. China supports its adoption. The draft resolution requests the Secretary-General to submit a report on its implementation before 30 June 2009.

I would like to point out that, a few months ago, at its sixty-second session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/134 on the same issue. In that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the resolution's implementation at the sixty-third session. To save resources and avoid duplication of labour, we hope the Secretary-General will strengthen coordination and make good use of all the information available so as to submit high-quality reports to both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1) reaffirms that the progress for women is progress for all. The same is true in the field of peace and security. The comprehensive implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) would be an important guarantee for achieving this target. We support the Secretary-General in his continued efforts to implement the System-wide Action Plan. The Chinese Government has always attached great importance to the protection of the rights and interests of women and to the advancement of women. We are ready to work with the rest of the international community in a joint effort to reduce sexual violence in every corner of the world and achieve all targets related to the issue of women and peace and security.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Giadalla Ettalhi, Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, to take the floor.

Mr. Ettalhi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Let me convey our appreciation to Secretary of State Rice who, earlier, personally presided over this meeting. Let me also thank you, Mr. President, for your proposal to hold this open debate on such an important issue.

Libya is concerned at reports of sexual violence against women and girls in many conflict areas. We are even more concerned at the use of sexual violence against women as an instrument of war in some conflict situations. I do not believe that anyone would argue that such acts are not a heinous crime whose perpetrators must be brought to justice and must not enjoy impunity.

Resolution 1325 (2000) took up the issue, and in its paragraph 10 it called on all parties to armed conflict "to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse". In its paragraph 11, the resolution emphasized

> "the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls".

It is regrettable, indeed it is a stigma for mankind, that these crimes continue to be perpetrated on a daily basis. For example, it is reported that more than 880 rapes were committed in April alone in North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some estimate that that number reflects no more than 10 per cent of the true figure.

We note that heinous crimes of sexual violence against women in armed conflict, are perpetrated by three categories of people — armed forces personnel of States involved in conflict; personnel of the United Nations peacekeeping forces; and non-State actors that are parties to a conflict.

Due to the varying nature of the perpetrators of these crimes, it is natural that our approach to the problem should be adapted to the perpetrator. We believe that greater awareness of international humanitarian law through education in military institutions could help to alleviate the problem. However, this alone is not sufficient, as law is generally taught only to officers and not to ordinary soldiers, who are responsible for most of these crimes. Furthermore, some soldiers, even when aware of the relevant international law and because of the difficult circumstances of a conflict, do not in general pay much heed to the consequences of their acts. Therefore, Member States, with the assistance of the United Nations, must seek other means to deal with the problem and to raise the awareness of soldiers about the gravity of sexual violence against women and its moral abhorrence.

In this regard, we believe that in many societies religion has more effect than law. We do not believe that there is a single religion on Earth that lacks moral norms dealing with relations between soldiers and non-combatants in situations of war. Let me stress that Islam, for example, has deterrent moral norms related to the behaviour of combatants and their treatment of civilians. Those norms prevent and prohibit all crimes against civilians, including sexual crimes against women and girls.

We therefore propose that the Security Council urge all Member States to concentrate more on the moral and religious aspects of the training of military personnel, including peacekeeping forces. We also suggest the preparation of booklets setting out moral and religious norms related to the treatment of civilians in time of war, in addition to the norms of international humanitarian law. These could be distributed to soldiers in peacekeeping operations. Moreover, we believe that appropriate mechanisms must be created to address complaints by civilian victims of abuse by soldiers, including sexual violence against girls and women. This would also serve to deter such crimes.

Let me recall that all member States bear the responsibility to enact effective legislation against impunity, to conduct education and media campaigns enhancing awareness on women's rights and training programmes to help eliminate cultural prejudice against women.

We believe that the Security Council can play a vital role in taking the measures necessary to protect women and girls from sexual violence in conflict situations. It can also urge States to prosecute the perpetrators of such crimes, particularly because impunity can put at risk hard-earned national reconciliation and peace.

In conclusion, let me stress that the complete solution to sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations lies in resolving conflict, attaining peace, creating an accountable, transparent and effective security sector, encouraging development in post-conflict countries and promoting women's participation in many fields.

Through its specialized agencies, the United Nations can contribute by supporting national efforts to advance women and by funding training and education programmes for women and children, in particular in rural areas.

Finally, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for having submitted the draft resolution before us, which we support.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Le Luong Minh, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam, to take the floor.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): I thank you, Mr. President, and the United States delegation for convening this important debate on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict as a follow-up to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, an issue to which my country attaches great importance. I thank Secretary of State Rice for personally presiding over the Council's deliberations earlier today. I also thank Their Excellencies the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for their participation and their statements.

Commitments to resolve the issue of sexual violence against women are contained in major documents such as the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (General Assembly resolution 60/1), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These, together with the 2008 adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 62/134 on "Eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations" and the Secretary-General's launch this year of a multi-year global campaign to end violence against women, manifest the concern of Member States about the widespread nature of this type of inhumane acts against the "better half" of humankind as well as their determination to tackle it.

My delegation is deeply concerned by the grave sexual violence in many conflict areas, which continues to occur despite repeated strong condemnation and calls for the parties concerned to take measures to prevent and put an end to such acts, whose consequences are not only the personal suffering of women and girls, but very often also the breakdown of their families and the spread of contagious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which adversely affect whole communities and their post-conflict reconstruction processes. The consequences are even more severe when victims are under-age girls.

Viet Nam holds the view that the most effective way to protect women and girls from sexual violence, including sexual violence in armed conflict, is to empower women and girls, help them understand their fundamental rights and raise their awareness and their capacity to protect themselves. We fully endorse the women's empowerment and advancement measures set out in the Beijing Platform for Action. As sexual violence, including sexual violence in armed conflict situations, has been a major topic intensively debated by other pertinent United Nations bodies, it is important to enhance the efficiency of those existing mechanisms and improve coordination and cooperation between the Security Council and those bodies, while avoiding duplication of their work.

The inter-agency United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict should serve as a tool to enhance such coordination. At the same time, we must make sure that any new mechanism to be established will be given careful consideration so as not to create unnecessary administrative and financial burdens for Member States and United Nations agencies.

I wish to further emphasize that States bear the primary responsibility to protect their own civilians and deal with violence against them, including sexual violence.

As far as peacekeeping missions are concerned, we support the recommendation contained in the draft resolution presented for adoption by the Council today that the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Security Council, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and its Working Group and relevant States, develop and implement appropriate training programmes for all peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel deployed by the United Nations in the context of missions, as mandated by the Council, to help them better prevent, recognize and respond to sexual violence and other forms of violence against civilians.

This and the empowerment of women and girls are essential measures of prevention, which is, in my delegation's view, always more effective and less costly than cure.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Jorge Urbina, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, to take the floor.

Mr. Urbina (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Mr. President, and your delegation for convening this important debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the ministers that have taken part in this debate for their presence. I would like to welcome the presence of Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro and Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa.

Without a doubt, the twenty-first century should be the century of women. Despite all the progress made during the last century, women crossed the threshold of the third millennium bearing the heaviest of all human burdens. We are very clear that this is not the forum in which to advocate for the emancipation and empowerment of women, but we welcome today's meeting as an opportunity to debate the issue of violence against women in situations of armed conflict. On this day and in this place, we are witnessing a convergence of efforts to make war more humane and to ensure that women everywhere enjoy their full status as human beings.

Two weeks ago, a group of Council representatives visited a number of camps for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There we heard the voices of women who spoke of the sufferings of war, the murder of their comrades, the massacre of their children and the violation of their bodies. Their experiences oblige us to ensure that today's debate does not conceal the reality of the pain, humiliation and outrage behind technical language.

This must be a debate that truly responds to the wish expressed by those women. None of them spoke to us of revenge; rather I recall them speaking to us of their hopes, their desire to return to their homes and their dream of living in a safe and secure environment. I also recall them expressing the hope that they will never again be victims of further violations and outrages.

We must come away from today's debate prepared to learn to prevent. Hitherto we have focused our efforts on suppressing violence against women in situations of armed conflict and on fighting impunity. We have limited ourselves to seeking to carry out security sector reform — and not always with great success. Although our efforts to end impunity through action by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the ad hoc tribunals, are important and indeed indispensable, they are not sufficient. We must now enhance what we have been doing and must learn to create prevention mechanisms; that will be a complex and difficult process.

If we truly want to be effective and to help women in times of conflict — women in Africa, women in the Balkans, women everywhere, the women of today and tomorrow — we must undertake the difficult task of engaging in prevention. I say it is difficult because prevention is not the same in all places or in all cultural contexts. I say it also because prevention cannot be tackled only from the standpoint of the woman: that would amount to making her out to be guilty of her own pain. Violence against women in war and in all other contexts can be prevented only from the standpoint of the perpetrator.

Violence against women in situations of armed conflict cannot be understood or prevented if it is analysed only through the prism of sexual violence. We are witnessing abhorrent methods of warfare; these are weapons of terror whose victims are not only the direct casualties but also their families and their communities. We must not trivialize this phenomenon, for that would be to continue to fail to prevent it and to respond to it effectively. It is indisputable that sexual violence, when carried out in a systematic and widespread manner and is part of an attack against innocent populations, exacerbates an armed conflict and becomes an enormous obstacle to its resolution and to peacebuilding.

For that reason, Costa Rica pointed out during last month's debate on post-conflict peacebuilding convened by the United Kingdom (see S/PV.5895) the need for all peacekeeping operations to be conceived as integrated missions bringing together all United Nations efforts, including the contribution of the Peacebuilding Commission. Only in that way will we be on the road of prevention, able to provide an enduring response to this problem, one which has prevented women from fully playing their important role in preventing and settling conflicts and in building peace.

The President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Marty Natalegawa, Permanent Representative of Indonesia, to take the floor.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Today thousands of women continue to be suffer sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, in violation of their human rights and international humanitarian law — in violation, indeed, of our conscience and human dignity. These practices, wilful or wanton, horrify us and give us pause. They must be stopped.

We are grateful, therefore, to the delegation of the United States for convening today's debate on this critical topic. And we were pleased to see the Secretary of State presiding over this very important meeting. We also deeply appreciate the leadership of the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General on this issue.

This meeting serves not merely as a forum to condemn various forms of violence against women in armed conflicts. Likewise, it is more than a showcase of the strength and indestructibility of our determination to end impunity and protect women in situations of armed conflicts. This meeting is, first and foremost, about fulfilling the full potential of women in time of peace and in time of war.

It is from that broad perspective that Indonesia views this meeting. All States, all societies, have common interests, common core values and the common objective that women should and must be protected at all times, including in situations of armed conflict. It is therefore imperative that we, the international community, tackle these crimes with vigour and with iron determination. No shadow of ambiguity should cloud our action to end these atrocities. Indonesia believes that the international community has to continue to develop and implement a variety of comprehensive strategies to address this issue.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) is a guidepost for our actions. The resolution calls for parties to armed conflict to protect women from violence and to end impunity for war crimes. However, much remains to be done.

Rape and sexual violence are indisputably violations of the laws of war and constitute a crime under international humanitarian law. But another problem that women face as survivors of sexual violence is the existence of barriers to achieving justice through the courts or through more informal community-based mechanisms. Many survivors face a great deal of exclusion in their communities if they publicly reveal the sufferings they have endured. Women victims are frequently shunned and ostracized.

Furthermore, the judicial systems in many armed conflict areas are far from well functioning due to structural inadequacy. Thus, the legal capacity of national and local governments to act swiftly when reports or warnings come in must be strengthened. The judiciary plays the critical role of bringing to justice the perpetrators of sexual crimes in armed conflict and in ensuring reparations for the victims.

Security and police sector institutions play an important role in responding to sexual violence in armed conflict. Police sector reform should be considered in places where sexual violence is prevalent, and it should include an assessment of how police services can best assist victims and prevent and investigate these crimes, as well as of how police officers themselves can be made more gender-sensitive, how their activities can be regulated and how they can be punished for engaging in these types of crimes.

Peacekeepers also play an important role in protecting women and girls from sexual violence where they serve. More women should play key roles, including as military observers, civilian police and envoys and special representatives of the Secretary-General.

Many survivors of sexual violence suffer from grave long-term psychological and physical health consequences, even once the brutality is over. There is a great need for adequate medical services to meet the needs of this population.

The greater United Nations system has to target the needs of women for health care and treatment, as well as other indicators of development that not only help to treat the victims but also play a role in preventing the worsening of a conflict and its ill effects on women. Identifying the perpetrators is also essential in order to shift the balance from victims living in shame to shaming the perpetrators. For this, it is crucial, as a part of a comprehensive attack against these heinous crimes, that United Nations missions conduct wide public awareness campaigns in their respective mandate areas.

The protection of women in armed conflict should be further strengthened; that much is clear. Ultimately, however, our aim should be the prevention of armed conflict itself. Here, the Security Council, in cooperation with regional organizations, should play its role in promoting the prevention of conflict and the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Arias, Permanent Representative of Panama.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to congratulate your Government, Mr. President, for having convened this important meeting. I would also like to acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly at the beginning of the meeting. I would like to thank them and the Council's special invitees for their important statements.

The annals of modern history document the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. The conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are but the most recent and notorious examples. The recurring nature and increase in the number of acts of sexual and gender-based violence mean that such violence has gone from being a weapon of war to an epidemic. That is especially true in countries where the absence of the rule of law makes it impossible for the State to provide the necessary protection to millions of women and girls.

Moreover, it is generally accepted today that systematic acts of sexual and gender-based violence are violations of human rights, affect human security and development and represent an assault on international peace and security. As a result, the international community has classified such criminal behaviour as crimes against humanity and given the special courts established by the Security Council and the International Criminal Court jurisdiction in trying and convicting those guilty of committing such crimes.

However, despite those efforts and other normative progress made in this area, in particular the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), women and girls continue to be subject to all sorts of discriminatory violence. It is therefore essential that the Security Council duly consider the use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war and devise mechanisms to mitigate, eliminate and effectively punish that practice. In doing so, it is imperative to recognize that justice is the main guarantor of human rights. The Security Council must therefore send a clear warning that acts of sexual violence against women and girls in situations of armed conflict will not go unpunished. It must also provide special support for the International Criminal Court to ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes are tried and convicted.

The Council must also establish clear, convincing and viable mandates for peacekeeping operations that ensure the protection of civilians, especially women and girls. Where appropriate, the Council must also reassess the effectiveness and scope of such mandates. In that regard, the Council should also support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy for personnel working in peacekeeping operations.

Likewise, the Security Council and the rest of the Organization should redouble their efforts to provide victimized women and children with adequate health services — including free and confidential testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the appropriate treatment, psychological care and post-trauma evaluation, rehabilitation and social reintegration services and effective and sufficient compensation. Those efforts should be supported by awareness-raising and education campaigns on the human rights of women and children and the impact that sexual violence has both on its victims and on society in general.

In order to improve the ability of the Security Council to react effectively to this challenge, we need credible and relevant information about sexual violence. It is therefore imperative that the Secretary-General provide the Council with periodic reports highlighting the deep-rooted causes of the phenomenon, as well as the most effective strategies to combat it. In relevant cases, the Secretary-General should also include more detailed information about the issue in his reports on specific conflict situations.

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize the need to acknowledge that women and girls are crucial pillars of society. Ending the cycle of violence against them before, during and after armed conflict depends in large part upon their empowerment and active participation in all areas of the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries. To put it slightly differently, women and girls require peace, and peace requires them.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Vitaly Churkin, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In conflict as in peacetime, sexual violence is a detestable crime that requires condemnation and strict sanctioning. We are especially concerned about situations in which that phenomenon is widespread and systematic. It is also unacceptable for violence and sexual exploitation to be committed by the personnel of peacekeeping operations, that is, by the very people called upon to protect civilians.

We must also consider this issue in a comprehensive manner and in the context of all the other complex problems that arise in the process of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

We should not forget that women and children continue to be the victims of deliberate attacks, including terrorist acts, indiscriminate and excessive violence and violations of international humanitarian law. Given the various types of violence involved, we must pay attention to all the categories. The issue of women and peace and security should not be reduced to that of sexual violence alone. That balanced approach is at the heart of resolution 1325 (2000), which is an important point of reference in terms of protecting women and ensuring their rights in conflict situations.

The issues of violence and of women in conflict situations must be discussed in the Security Council as well as in the General Assembly, the Peacebuilding Commission, the Human Rights Council and many other bodies. It is a priority for the United Nations to respond to widespread and systematic violence against women and children. Those goals are all part of the gender component in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the subject of today's meeting, and also of the annual thematic reports on women and peace and security, the protection of civilians in armed conflict, children and armed conflict, and others.

The situation is hardly optimal when we ask the Secretary-General for a report on sexual violence only to find that the same request has been made by a body other than the Security Council. In particular, we have asked him for a report on women and peace and security. We must recall that the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/134 — on eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations — which also required an appropriate report of the Secretary-General on the issue of sexual violence.

Women's full participation in peace negotiations an post-conflict recovery efforts is an important precondition for the elimination of violence against women. In those processes, we must consistently implement the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and similar instruments in the area of human rights. Ensuring the social and economic development of States is a main factor in preventing conflict and violence.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that the delegation of the Russian Federation shares the understanding on today's topical issue of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. We therefore support the draft resolution to be adopted today by the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Yukio Takasu, Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission and Permanent Representative of Japan.

Mr. Takasu: I would like to commend the leadership of the United States for organizing this open debate, and I thank you, Mr. President, for inviting me to participate in my capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The landmark resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security calls upon all parties involved to ensure the protection of and respect for the human rights of women and girls and provides a solid framework for women's equal and full participation in every stage of building peace and ensuring security. The challenge we face is to generate stronger political will and spur greater concrete actions.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), steady progress has been made in helping more women to participate in post-conflict decision-making. Significant percentages of the national parliaments of many post-conflict countries are now women. More women are taking leadership positions in the executive branch. Several female Special Representatives of the Secretary-General have been appointed. The international community has been gaining more understanding of the unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls and a growing recognition that women's participation is essential to ensuring conflict resolution, inclusive reconciliation, peacebuilding and sustainable peace.

However, we have been less successful in protecting women and girls from gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. Many women still suffer from a sense of insecurity. They remain particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, both in the midst of conflict and in its immediate aftermath. We need only look at the situation of sexual violence and abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Darfur to understand the horrific magnitude of the problem and how urgently we must address it. We must admit that our collective response to gender-based violence has been inadequate thus far, and this failure to respond is magnified over time, because the effects of sexual violence linger long after the fact, undermining and threatening the potential for peace and stability. Every effort must be made to promote the human security of women and girls in a fragile situation by physically protecting and empowering them.

In order to take effective measures to meet those challenges, there are several actions that the Security Council may wish to consider. First, collecting actual data on the impact of sexual violence on women and girls and on perpetrators is an important first step to establishing a strategy to meet their needs on the ground. Secondly, ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for such sexual crimes cannot be overemphasized and will facilitate communal reconciliation in post-conflict situations. Thirdly, gender-sensitive training programmes for peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel must be strengthened, at both the national and international levels. Fourthly, the mandate of peacekeeping operations could reflect more concrete actions in implementing resolution 1325 (2000), in order to mainstream a gender perspective and provide protection from gender-based violence.

The Peacebuilding Commission, which is a very new body, has been ensuring, through its advocacy role and resource mobilization efforts, that a gender perspective becomes an integral part of any peacebuilding process. Significant efforts have been made to engage women and gender equality groups at various levels of the Commission's work, fully reflecting the priorities and issues of relevance to women's groups. Gender perspectives have been included as a critical and priority issue in the integrated peacebuilding strategies for Burundi and Sierra Leone. Commitments to be undertaken by the Governments and the international community are clearly articulated in order to combat gender-based violence, ensure greater participation of women at all levels of decision-making and build the capacity of women's groups and national gender-equality institutions.

The working group on lessons learned also considered the issue of gender and peacebuilding earlier this year and concluded that the gender issue should be viewed not just as a women's issue. It is an imperative in any peacebuilding effort, including security sector reform. We cannot effectively deal with this complex problem if the burden of responsibility for doing so rests only with women. The existence of legal frameworks and policies is not enough, because they will not end violence by themselves. Compliance, implementation and enforcement are critical. The issue should be tackled in a holistic manner, including not only security and justice sector reform, but also basic social services such as education and health services, employment and income generation, in order to empower women and girls.

In countries emerging from conflict, national Governments and other local stakeholders are ready to address the root causes of conflict, including the marginalization of women. But they often do not have the sufficient resources and capacities to do so effectively. On the ground, that requires a range of integrated efforts for multiple stakeholders such as government institutions, United Nations entities and civil society organizations. We need stronger support to improve the operational capacity of all of those players in order to fully meet gender equality commitments.

We must also work with local women's groups to fight prejudice and stigma and advance efforts to end impunity for such crimes. The roles of parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and the media are also important to enhance the accountability of the authorities and those in power for their actions — or, sometimes, their inaction.

With that recognition, I assure the Council that the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to make every effort to raise the international profile of the needs of women and girls in peacebuilding efforts and to mobilize the necessary support and resources in a coordinated and integrated manner.

It is my sincere hope that today's open debate will help to generate more political will and greater action. We must all do our part to match the fine words of the Security Council's resolutions, with concrete actions that make a real difference for the women and girls whom the Council has pledged to protect and empower.

The President: I now invite Her Excellency Ms. Philomene Omatuku, Minister of Gender, Family and Child of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to take the floor.

Ms. Omatuku (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): First of all, on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would like to thank the United States of America for having taken the initiative to convene this important thematic Security Council debate on women and peace and security and for having prepared the concept paper before us (S/2008/364, annex).

As a citizen of the country that is suffering under the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, I am particularly grateful to you, Mr. President. This current meeting, indeed, once again places the question of sexual violence against women at the heart of the concerns of the Security Council. I am convinced that it will show us the way forward to eradicate this detestable phenomenon.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo expresses its appreciation and thanks to the Secretary-General, who has placed the suffering of Congolese women and girls at the centre of his concerns. His presence here in the Chamber today testifies to that.

My gratitude also goes to the members of the Security Council. They recently visited my country, showing once again the great importance that this principal organ of the United Nations, charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, attaches to this thorny question.

I also welcome and am very thankful for the invaluable help that the entire United Nations system gives to my country as its searches for solutions on the ground to the issue of violence against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Violence against women in situations of armed conflict is an outrage that requires an appropriate and substantial response from the international community. That is why my country did not hesitate to sponsor the resolution presented to the General Assembly by the delegation of the United States on the elimination of rape and other forms of sexual violence in all its manifestations, particularly in armed conflicts and similar situations (General Assembly resolution 62/134).

Thus, wars and armed conflicts in modern times have made rape an unprecedentedly cruel weapon of war, in order to obliterate the enemy and destroy the family, whole communities and, above all, the dignity of women.

Sexual violence weakens women and girls, as much in terms of their moral, physical and psychological health as in terms of their economic health. Female victims of this type of violence are stigmatized, repudiated as wives and excluded from their community. This violence also promotes the spread of HIV/AIDS. Moreover, 50 per cent of the victims of sexual violence are less than 18 years old: they are children. I am very happy to report that our child protection code will be adopted in the Senate next week after it has gone through the National Assembly, with a view to providing security for girls.

Sexual violence is leading to a feminization of poverty and is adding to the growing problem of food insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Women victims are no longer able to work the land. Women victims are simply no longer able to work.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, under the leadership of His Excellency President Joseph Kabila Kabange, has been resolutely following a multisectoral approach in fighting violence against women and girls, concentrating on three priority areas: care, compensation and prevention. Care involves psychological and medical care in specialized units. We have the option of renovating existing hospital buildings rather than building new ones for that purpose. Another element is socio-economic help for reintegrating victims into society and providing training on how to become independent. We wish also to provide more legal aid, to encourage victims to bring their cases to court by paying their legal fees, and protecting them from their rapists, who are often extremely threatening. Care also involves the return to school of girls who have been victims of sexual violence, and taking care of the orphans, unwanted children and children who have been abandoned by their parents.

Compensation involves the application of the law and the effective implementation of judicial decisions with a view to compensating victims and ensuring their security. We plan to establish a compensation fund managed in collaboration with public and civil society partners.

Prevention — by no means the least important issue — chiefly concerns the fight against impunity, including the fight against ignorance by disseminating the relevant international legal instruments available and the laws on sexual violence, so that women victims know their rights and so that the judges know what their powers are.

The judicial and penal infrastructure, which have been ravaged by years of war and pillaging, should be improved and better equipped in order to prevent breakouts of the rapists who have been sentenced or are in detention. Another element is strengthening the capacity of judges in this area and training women judges in order to provide legal assistance to victims. Prevention also involves increasing the number of female military, police and civilian officers in order to enhance the collection of information on violence against women. This list is not exhaustive, but it also includes a procedure to prevent rapists from being able to hold positions of responsibility and, if necessary, to relieve them of their functions.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo feels that we must enhance the status of women, because if men do not realize that women are their equals, they will not think that rape is disgraceful. We have to continue to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Moreover, article 14 of the constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo provides for the implementation of gender equality in all institutions. I am happy to report that a draft text from my ministry relating to the implementation of parity has been prepared and is following the necessary procedures.

In resolution 1325 (2000), the Security Council called on all parties to armed conflict to take all measures to protect women and girls against acts of gender-based violence, in particular, rape and other forms of sexual abuse, as well as all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.

Thus, we would stress that the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) will lead to the recognition of the role of women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping. It is important to involve women in the mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts so that they can lend to humanity their capacity to create consensus, to resolve conflicts and to build peace.

Internationally, the fight against sexual violence can be supported by strengthening the mandates of peacekeeping operations, with a view to protecting women and children against violence.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo feels the full force of this problem and will spare no effort to fight against the scourge of sexual violence, with its attendant suffering, including the use of women as sexual slaves, held hostage by armed groups in forests. My country makes an impassioned appeal to the international community for a return of sustainable peace. This is a sine qua non condition for the complete eradication of sexual violence.

Indeed, a political consensus is emerging following free, democratic and transparent elections. Thus, the conflicts in eastern the Democratic Republic of the Congo are lamentable. All power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must go through the ballot box. What are these armed men — these armed groups — the non-regular army — doing in eastern Congo? What is the international community doing?

Congolese women, victims of sexual violence, are also hostages to the natural resources of Congo, which are being exploited illegally.

I remind the Council that women in general, and the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in particular, have the right to peace without fear of violence or oppression. They have the right to peace, without which all hope for dignity, well-being and development will be in vain and compromised. I conclude by hoping that Congolese women's appeal for peace — which I echo here — will be heard, because trying to fight against sexual violence without seeking peace is nothing more than a delusion.

I would like to thank all previous speakers who mentioned the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In particular, I reiterate my thanks to the United States of America for having made it possible to have this debate, enabling me to speak — a person from a country that is very affected by this issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Fritsche (Liechtenstein): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate and for the personal efforts of Secretary Rice on the issue of women and peace and security, in particular in the framework of the Women Leaders' Working Group.

We appreciate the careful preparation of today's meeting, including the early submission of a draft resolution. However, even though we are happy to sponsor the draft resolution, we would have preferred for the debate to have an impact on its drafting. We hope that future open debates will follow that example.

My delegation has supported resolution 1325 (2000) in its entirety ever since its adoption, and we believe that it has had a positive impact on the ground. Nevertheless, we agree with the assessment in the concept paper that progress towards achieving its major goals has been slow and uneven. In particular, the United Nations must appoint more women to senior positions with regard to preventive diplomacy, mediation and peace operations. This would have a clear impact on the topic under discussion today. Appointing more women to leading positions would, without any doubt, have a catalytic effect and empower women affected by armed conflict. It would strengthen the perception that women are stakeholders, as opposed to mere victims or aid recipients.

A few years ago, during my time as Permanent Representative in New York, I had the honour of heading a group of like-minded ambassadors aiming to increase the presence of women in such positions. The success of our cooperation with the Secretary-General in that regard then was very modest indeed and, several years later, it is sad to note that very little progress has been made, in spite of repeated expressions of good intentions from all sides. Nevertheless, we believe that resolution 1325 (2000) has, overall, had a positive impact on the work of the United Nations in this field, while its full potential has yet to be explored.

Sexual violence is one of the most important aspects of resolution 1325 (2000) and merits a separate discussion. While sexual violence has always been a part of armed conflict, its systematic and targeted use in numerous situations today is not just a by-product of hostilities or merely a war crime. It has become a method of warfare that aims to destroy the social fabric of communities in order to achieve political and military goals. The General Assembly addressed this trend as early as in 1995 by adopting resolutions on rape and sexual violence in the context of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the trend has continued unabated. The increasingly systematic use of sexual violence is part of a larger pattern. One of the main consequences of the changing nature of armed conflict is the increasing victimization and targeting of civilian populations, which puts women and girls at particular risk.

The protection of civilians must be an inherent task for all peacekeeping missions. This applies in particular to acts of sexual violence. Peacekeepers are currently providing protection, including against sexual violence, only on an ad hoc basis and under a flexible interpretation of their sometimes vague mandates. Future mandates must provide clear guidance, in particular to commanders, on how to protect civilians, including girls and women, from sexual violence. Resolution 1794 (2007) can serve as an example in this regard. Furthermore, predeployment and on-mission training programmes must instruct police, security and humanitarian personnel on how to recognize and react to incidents of sexual violence.

Sadly, girls and women in affected regions often associate uniformed personnel with sexual violence. It is therefore crucial to deploy more women in civilian components of peacekeeping missions, empower local women leaders and increase their role in all peacekeeping efforts.

Most important, those who are supposed to provide protection must never themselves become perpetrators. All acts of sexual violence committed by peacekeepers, including sexual exploitation of local woman and child prostitution, are unacceptable. Such acts heavily undermine the credibility and effectiveness of any given peace operation, but also of our Organization as a whole. Zero tolerance can be the only answer to such incidents. Indeed, the ultimate goal must be for the attitude and behaviour of peacekeepers towards women to serve as a model for local communities.

Very significant progress has been made over the past few years with regard to the issue of impunity. Both ad hoc tribunals established by the Council have made highly significant contributions in this respect. In the *Akayesu* case, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda established that rape, under certain circumstances, can constitute an act of genocide. The codification of sexual violence as internationally punishable crime occurred in the context of the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in July 1998. The explicit inclusion of sexual violence in the provisions dealing with war crimes and crimes against humanity was one of the many significant steps forward reflected in the Rome Statute.

Today, almost 10 years later, the Court is fully operational and is currently dealing with situations where sexual violence is rampant. One of them is the situation in Darfur, which the Security Council has referred to the Court. It is therefore clear that the parts of the draft resolution dealing with the question of impunity are indeed incomplete without a specific reference to the International Criminal Court. We think that the text would have sent an even stronger message if it had included such a reference. We also think that the Council should call for cooperation with all international tribunals and courts that deal with sexual violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ghana.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): I join previous speakers in commending the delegation of the United States for convening this timely open debate, which seeks to address the grave sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. We welcome the presence of United States Secretary of State Rice and Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro.

This gathering reinforces our shared belief in the inherent dignity of every human being whether in time of peace or in time of conflict. Indeed, the inclusion of a range of sexual violence offences in the Statutes of both the International Criminal Court and the ad hoc international criminal tribunals was itself a strong affirmation of our shared value that there should be no tolerance for impunity.

As expressly set out in the concept paper prepared by the United States (S/2008/364, annex), there are practical challenges that we have to grapple with in order to make meaningful progress in dealing with gender-based and sexual violence, which remain an important part of resolution 1325 (2000), considering the almost daily and disturbing reports on rape and other forms of sexual abuse emanating from several of the conflict situations in the world, particularly in Africa.

Improving the response to the scourge of sexual and other forms of violence against women poses a great challenge, particularly to developing countries, which are the major troop contributors. This challenge calls for fresh thinking aimed at finding more appropriate measures to enable the United Nations to discharge its mandate more effectively and with maximum flexibility and efficiency. As the representative of a major troop-contributing country, allow me to briefly share my Government's experiences and its perspective on ways to improve the response of peacekeeping personnel to the scourge of sexual and other forms of violence against women in situations of armed conflict.

We wish to emphasize that women peacekeepers serve as role models and encourage girl soldiers and victims to embrace programmes to disarm former combatants and generally have a salutary and positive impact on security sector reform, electoral support and gender mainstreaming in broken societies where women are even more marginalized.

Troop-contributing countries must take responsibility for deploying well-trained peacekeepers. The term "well-trained" must be redefined to include having gender awareness. Gender training should also take place in national staff colleges; it should be realistic and based on exercises, case studies and split-second decision-making.

Greater representation by women is therefore required not only as a matter of principle, but also as a practical matter, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of peacekeeping. In this respect, Ghana has made concerted efforts to increase the integration of women in its armed and security forces and would endeavour to deploy more women as peacekeepers. One innovative strategy Ghana endorses is fostering closer coordination between public institutions that deal with peacekeeping and those that deal with women's affairs. We must put security institutions in closer working relationships with women's organizations.

We underscore the importance of security sector reform as an essential element of peace and security. But to be sustainable, such reform must be gender-sensitive. Women are the glue that holds families and communities together, even in the midst of war. There is a need for greater recognition of the roles women play in peace consolidation, and they should must be consulted in all activities undertaken on their behalf and be equitably represented in strategic responses to violations.

Better liaison with women's constituencies can improve access to operational intelligence and can serve as force multipliers in the achievement of mission objectives. Increasing women's voice in security and governance structures can help weed out the root causes of violence and discrimination. Gender-sensitive protection efforts should be recognized and rewarded to help ensure that peacekeeping forces accord high-priority to the protection of women and girls.

Failure to prosecute is a licence to rape. Consistency in prosecutions and in referrals to justice mechanisms shows that the Security Council takes this matter seriously. All perpetrators and would-be perpetrators must know that the international community, particularly the Security Council, is watching and is ready to act to end impunity for sexual violence. States should review and, when necessary, revise or create applicable laws to ensure that sexual violence against women is always criminalized.

Bolstering the role and capacity of both the United Nations and regional security institutions is also essential. Our region, for example, has benefited from action at the regional level. The African Union has demonstrated its zeal in helping to end conflicts on the continent, and cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union has been positive and should continue to improve and give meaningful protection for women.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) is premised on the twin pillars of protection and empowerment. National-level responses must ultimately aim at reducing women's economic vulnerability and dependence as well as their exposure to exploitative relationships and sexual abuse. In that connection, protection should not only be a reactive, band-aid solution; efforts should be made to empower women and girls in the long term.

As clearly stated by the Secretary-General in February 2008, at the launch of a multi-year campaign to end violence against women, Member Governments, the private sector and civil society can effectively support increased actions on the ground to end such violence, prevent this affront to humanity and ensure that women and girls have the right to a life free of violence.

Ghana, for its part, will do all that is possible at the diplomatic, policy and operational levels, as we have done since the dawn of United Nations peacekeeping, to bring about the desired change and impact on peacekeeping operations, aimed at ending sexual violence against women. We also take note of the provision to strengthen access to justice and services for survivors of sexual violence as well as the emphasis on regional cooperation.

Ghana believes that the draft resolution to be adopted at the end of this debate constitutes a good basis for our work, and we support the recommendations contained therein. We are particularly pleased to recognize the emphasis on the role and conduct of peacekeeping missions, including related recommendations for troop-contributing and police-contributing countries.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Ms. Stiglic (Slovenia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

In the interest of time, I will limit myself to an abbreviated version of our statement. The complete and official statement on behalf of the European Union is being distributed in the room.

I would like to begin by commending the United States presidency on the initiative to convene this thematic debate. The presence of the United States Secretary of State today, as well as that of other high-level representatives, shows that the international community understands the urgency of this important issue and stands ready to take it forward. We hope this timely and topical debate will help us do just that.

I would like to recall a remark made by Major General Patrick Cammaert in his statement at today's debate, that it is more dangerous to be a woman that to be a soldier right now in armed conflict. Women have always been particularly vulnerable victims during armed conflicts, but in modern history sexual violence has developed into a method of warfare.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), linking gender equality to global security and acknowledging the importance of women's voices in building lasting peace, represents a milestone on the road to more gender-sensitive peace processes and security policies.

We must considerably strengthen our efforts to guarantee the protection of women and girls in conflict-affected societies and to ensure their full and equal participation in peace processes at all levels, including negotiations and decision-making, insisting that women be fully engaged in all humanitarian, reconstruction and development programmes.

The European Union believes that the best way to promote women's rights and women's empowerment and to respond to the needs of women is through a gender-sensitive approach. Human rights and gender issues are being mainstreamed in our development cooperation policies. Through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, we have supported women's participation in peace processes in Colombia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia. Furthermore, the EU Initiative for Peacebuilding will be exploring ways to ensure the effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) by the international community, Governments and local civil society organizations. We also have a strong commitment to mainstream gender equality in the European Security and Defence Policy.

Sexual and gender-based violence is an area of particular concern to women and girls in armed conflict situations, although we know now that also boys and men may be subjected to such violence and to sexual torture. Violence against women and girls, including rape and sexual slavery, is often used as a weapon of war in order to demoralize women themselves or the community to which they belong. Importantly, high levels of sexual and gender-based violence also rarely cease at the end of hostilities and continue well into the post-conflict phase.

Examples from the recent past and, unfortunately, at this present moment show the extensiveness and severity of sexual violence against women in armed conflict. Today, armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are using sexual violence as a weapon of war to terrorize the population. In Darfur too, women and girls continue to be affected by high levels of gender-based violence and sexual crimes including rape, while impunity remains a serious problem.

The short- and long-term costs of sexual and gender-based violence were largely underestimated or ignored in the past and there still remains a lack of coordinated and effective action. Such violence is surrounded by a culture of silence and impunity, and the range and complexity of the underlying causes make it a difficult issue to address, particularly in conflict-affected situations, where judicial and security institutions are weak.

Impunity for perpetrators and an insufficient response to the needs of survivors are unacceptable. Grave violations of women's human rights through massive rape and other sexual violence require the immediate attention of the International Criminal Court and other relevant tribunals.

There is a strong need to develop and promote innovative approaches that turn women from victims of rape into rape survivors. Such approaches should ensure their safety and support their access to justice, and should actively support their economic empowerment through income-generating activities. Furthermore, they should also ensure adequate care, recognizing women's sexual and reproductive health needs.

On this occasion, the European Union reiterates its strong commitment to the zero-tolerance policy, in the firm belief that under no circumstances can gender-based violence be condoned in peacekeeping or other United Nations-led operations. There should be no impunity for gender-based violence in the United Nations.

Every United Nations peacekeeping mission should include, as a priority, the protection of women and the safeguarding of women peacebuilders and should include information about sexual and gender-based violence in its regular reports to the Security Council. Furthermore, it is essential that all military and civilian personnel serving on United Nations peacekeeping missions receive training on the protection and rights of women.

In conclusion, the European Union looks forward to the adoption of a strong and action-oriented draft resolution, with a broad sponsor base as an outcome of this thematic debate. We express our support for developing an effective and comprehensive system-wide approach for addressing the issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict with clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Hill (Australia): Australia would like to thank you, Mr. President, for including this issue on the Council's agenda.

Crimes of sexual violence are among the most widespread and egregious of all violent acts committed during armed conflict. We note with regret and disgust that sexual violence is often perpetrated by parties to a conflict. Put simply, the deliberate and widespread use of sexual violence is a crime against humanity and, if used as a method of warfare, a war crime. Australia condemns this egregious behaviour and demands that the impunity of perpetrators of these despicable acts stop. The international community must hold rapists to account. We have the tools, including the International Criminal Court, at our disposal, and we must mobilize them urgently.

As we are all too aware, crimes of sexual violence are also, in some circumstances, perpetrated by United Nations personnel. Any act of sexual violence or exploitation by United Nations personnel undermines the credibility of the United Nations in times of crisis. More than that, it is a gross breach of trust. The role of United Nations peacekeepers in the protection of civilians from all violence, including sexual violence, is an important one. There is a strong need to develop clear guidelines to ensure effective implementation of that task.

The role of police in peacekeeping operations is also of fundamental importance. Australia provides its police with training and guidance on sexual violence and also provides predeployment training to police forces from regional countries for missions such as the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands. We also recognize the important role of women in peacekeeping missions, whether they be military, police or civilian personnel. Almost 20 per cent of Australian police and military personnel currently involved in peacekeeping missions are women. Not only are women deployed by Australia; they often hold senior roles within these missions.

Australia reiterates calls by the international community for effective training and strong command structures within military and police contingents, be they Blue Berets or not, to prevent such crimes and, in situations where they have occurred, to prosecute them. The absence of an effective system to prosecute United Nations personnel who, while a member of a peacekeeping mission, perpetrate sexual crimes should not lead to impunity. Where this is the case, the State of nationality should take action to hold its own nationals to account.

Community education, including by non-governmental organizations, is also important, especially for those who come into contact with victims of sexual violence. Removing the stigma all too often attached to survivors of sexual violence and condemning this violence are also important elements of such education. It is also essential that victims of sexual violence have effective and equal access to justice, and that national systems, including appropriate national legislation, be in place to ensure effective judicial outcomes.

This is an important issue which requires the full attention of the international community. We urge the United Nations system and Member States to lead by example and to redouble their efforts to respond to the crime of sexual violence in armed conflict. As a first step, Australia calls on Member States to undertake more extensive predeployment training for all personnel, including those bound for United Nations missions. We cannot stand by and allow these violations to continue.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. In view of the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.5916/Corr.1

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5916th meeting

Thursday, 19 June 2008, 10 a.m.
New York

Corrigendum

Page 2, first column

In the list of countries whose representatives are requesting an invitation to participate, *insert* Armenia, Bulgaria, Chile, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden.

United Nations **S/PV.5916 (Resumption 1)**

Security Council

Sixty-third year

Provisional

5916th meeting

Thursday, 19 June 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	**Mr. Khalilzad**	**(United States of America)**
Members:	**Belgium**	**Mr. Lammens**
	Burkina Faso	**Mr. Tiendrébéogo**
	China	**Mr. Pan Jingyu**
	Costa Rica	**Mr. Weisleder**
	Croatia	**Mr. Vilović**
	France	**Mr. De Rivière**
	Indonesia	**Mr. Natalegawa**
	Italy	**Mr. Spatafora**
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	**Mr. Ettalhi**
	Panama	**Mr. Suescum**
	Russian Federation	**Mr. Rogachev**
	South Africa	**Ms. Lazouras**
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	**Ms. Cross**
	Viet Nam	**Mr. Bui The Giang**

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Letter dated 4 June 2008 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2008/364)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

08-39081 (E)

The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have just received letters from the representatives of Mauritania and San Marino, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers, as I indicated this morning, to limit their statements to no more than five minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Spain, to whom I now give the floor.

Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain welcomes the choice of the topic of women and peace and security for this thematic debate during the United States presidency of the Security Council in the month of June.

I should like to begin by saying that this morning we heard some extremely important statements, including those made by the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the presiding officers of important bodies of the Organization, the United States Secretary of State and, in particular, such individuals as the Ministers from Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as Major General Cammaert, who have very closely experienced this problem in various places, especially Africa.

Spain of course associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

Almost eight years after the Security Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), and in spite of greater awareness of the problem we are addressing today and improvements in prevention mechanisms, fully and effectively protecting women in conflict situations continues to be an unfinished task. Violations of the rights of women and girls in those situations continue to increase, despite the legal framework that the international community has put in place and the growing awareness of the severity of the problem. That awareness was reflected in the General Assembly's recent adoption of its resolution 62/134, on eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict situations, of which Spain was a sponsor.

Responding comprehensively to the use of sexual abuse as a weapon of war continues to pose a challenge for the international community. Along with the ad hoc measures adopted in extreme cases in given peacekeeping operations, it is imperative that the United Nations decisively address the question of how to structure and institutionalize an efficient response by the international community to this very serious problem. Among other things, we need to wage a frontal war against the impunity that, in too many conflict situations, is enjoyed by those responsible for committing crimes against civilians, especially women and girls.

International law has appropriate mechanisms at its disposal. Among them, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court categorizes systematic rape as a war crime and a crime against humanity and, in certain circumstances, even an act of genocide. Universal accession to the Rome Statute would be a crucial step towards combating impunity; as is the implementation of the principle of universal justice by States that have incorporated that principle in their legislation, as Spain has.

With regard to my country, and in the broader framework of the policy of equality that my Government has promoted and strongly defends, in November 2007 Spain adopted a national action plan to implement resolution 1325 (2000) within the context of the objectives of Spain's organic law for effective equality between men and women. In line with resolution 1325 (2000), Spain's action plan reflects the beliefs that peace is inextricably linked to equality between men and women and that women's equal access and full participation in power structures and their complete involvement in efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

In that regard, allow me to briefly refer to some of the measures that the Government of Spain has adopted to respond to the pending challenges. Those measures focus on six basic objectives: promoting the presence of women in peace missions in which Spain participates; mainstreaming the gender perspective in all phases of those missions; specific gender training of personnel participating in missions; full respect for the human rights of women and girls in conflict situations; promoting the principle of equality in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes; and promoting greater participation by civil society groups in this area.

Spain supports the establishment of special units within peacekeeping missions to specifically cater for women and girls who have been victims of sexual violence. Such units should be composed of specialized personnel and, moreover, should serve as coordination centres for the activities both of the United Nations system and of the donor community as a whole.

With regard to cases where crimes against women and girls have been committed by personnel of United Nations peace missions, the Organization has now begun to provide an integrated response to the problem. In that connection, we welcome the General Assembly's recent adoption of its resolution 62/214, the Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel. The Government of Spain firmly supports the zero-tolerance policy on this matter.

Spain is determined to promote new efforts to implement the provisions of resolution 1325 (2000). We are also finalizing an action plan on women and peacebuilding aimed at all actors participating in Spain's system of cooperation for development. The plan, which will not disregard the status of women as specific potential victims of violence, will highlight the particular importance of women as contributors to the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In a similar vein, the third meeting of African and Spanish women working for a better world — which took place in Niamey last May under the sponsorship of the Governments of Spain and Niger and which included the participation of women leaders and representatives from most African countries, as well as international bodies — adopted a final declaration that, among other things, stated that the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes must be recognized and supported, including through the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

The Niamey meeting also called for the establishment of a multi-donor gender and development fund that would be managed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women. Spain will contribute €50 million to that fund.

In conclusion, Spain fully supports the draft resolution before the Council, of which we are a sponsor. We hope that it will be adopted unanimously.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of New Zealand.

Ms. Graham (New Zealand): New Zealand welcomes this opportunity to focus on women and peace and security, and once again reaffirms its strong support for resolution 1325 (2000). New Zealand is committed to seeking ways to enhance and strengthen the implementation of the resolution through our development cooperation programmes, peacekeeping efforts and domestic policies.

Resolution 1325 (2000) remains the internationally accepted blueprint for a multifaceted response to the issues facing women in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. It has played an invaluable part in highlighting the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

New Zealand welcomes increased Security Council attention to the reality of sexual violence during conflict and to the need to end impunity for crimes, including sexual violence. Sadly, sexual violence continues unabated in conflict and post-conflict situations around the world. It is a gross violation of women's human rights, which further exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls in times of conflict. Sexual violence is an attack not only on the dignity of women but also on the peace process: it raises significant barriers to reconciliation and peace. New Zealand attaches great importance to the need to eliminate such violence.

We welcome the advances that have been made in these areas by the United Nations and Member States. We strongly endorse the Secretary-General's forthcoming report on all forms of violence against women. New Zealand has actively supported General

Assembly resolutions on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and on eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations.

New Zealand's response to resolution 1325 (2000) is proactive and includes a number of specific steps to encourage implementation both domestically and internationally. Here are four examples of that.

First, New Zealand is committed to encouraging women to undertake assignments on peacekeeping missions. Women from the New Zealand Defence Force, New Zealand Police and our wider society are an integral part of New Zealand's regional, United Nations and other international peacekeeping efforts. This includes women working in high-risk areas, such as Afghanistan, and on operational missions, such as in Timor-Leste. Furthermore, up to 30 per cent of all of our police peacekeeping deployments are female — among the highest rate in the world.

Secondly, the New Zealand Defence Force has worked hard to integrate women at all levels and in all trades of the Force, including combat. Its diversity strategy recognizes the full value of integrating women into the Defence Force and the benefits of having women at more senior levels.

Thirdly, New Zealand attaches priority to promoting women's rights through the delivery of official development assistance. Gender-based violence is a core focus area for New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency (NZAID). NZAID supports a number of initiatives in the Pacific region aimed at empowering women and mitigating their exposure to violence. For example, New Zealand is currently involved in the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme, a joint initiative of NZAID, the New Zealand Police and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police organization. It seeks to tackle domestic violence and influence social change.

Fourthly, the NZAID conflict and peacebuilding policy identifies women and girls in conflict and post-conflict areas as a priority group for attention and specifically includes the need to provide support for the full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). It highlights the gender impact of conflict and the role of women in peacebuilding.

In conclusion, New Zealand commends you, Mr. President, for the opportunity for this debate on resolution 1325 (2000), but we agree that progress towards achieving its major goals has been slow and uneven. There remains an urgent need to increase political commitment and resources to ensure its systematic implementation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Ms. Jahan (Bangladesh): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on women and peace and security, an issue of particular interest to the delegation of Bangladesh. Allow me to recall, with a modicum of pride, that Bangladesh was closely associated with the elaboration and adoption of that landmark resolution, resolution 1325 (2000), as a then-member of the Council.

Women and girls are the main victims of conflict situations. The inherent discrimination and inequalities that women suffer, by and large, can be and often are further deepened in post-conflict situations. Also, in peace and conflict resolution processes, women are the ones who are the most deprived. Their voices are not fully listened to, or even heard. The international community has been increasingly forthcoming in its resolve to undertake concerted measures to prevent gender-based violence.

However, eight years since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), sexual violence persists in conflict situations and in peace. We need to reflect further on how best we can address the issues of sexual violence, including its root causes. We need to analyse the challenges and how those can be overcome. There is no denying the fact that we need to ensure adequate representation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict prevention and in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. The true measure of women's participation in peace negotiations is not through numbers, but through power in decision-making. In the consolidation of peace, although the role of women remains a vital factor, it is often ignored.

The implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) has recorded some progress. We hope that the remaining shortcomings will be addressed in the updated 2008-2009 action plan. A number of constraints persist. There is an inadequate understanding of the gender dimension in conflict situations. That leads to gaps in capacity at the institutional and organizational levels to address various provisions of the resolution. Without adequate attention to and understanding of gender relations and inequalities, women will continue to remain excluded from peacebuilding initiatives. As a result of such situations, their needs are not fully understood. We need to further intensify our efforts in incorporating the gender perspective at all levels of peacebuilding. We also need to create expertise to address the issues related to sexual violence. One way to augment capacity is to facilitate women's participation in both formal and informal negotiations in the peace process.

The availability of gender-disaggregated data is particularly important in understanding the situation of women and girls who are victims of war and conflict. A focused examination of issues specifically related to violence against women is also important in the formulation of policy guidelines. That is an exercise that will assist in undertaking preventive measures. The sharing of experiences, good practices and lessons learned on a regular basis is useful not only in sustaining peace but also in guiding policy measures.

Peacekeeping operations are no longer limited to military activities. They now have broader mandates to assist in elections, monitor human rights and carry out police functions. Multifaceted peacekeeping operations thus have great potential in addressing the security of women. To that effect, we have successfully integrated the gender perspective in some aspects of United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts much remains to be done. As a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, Bangladesh remains vigilant in our focus on the provisions of resolution 1325 (2000).

As one of the largest contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations, Bangladesh is ever conscious of our responsibility to incorporate gender dimensions, particularly the essential elements of resolution 1325 (2000). At present, Bangladesh has more than 30 women police personnel deployed in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The percentage of women as peacekeepers and police from Bangladesh are set to increase in coming days.

We recognize that a strong Security Council mechanism is needed to monitor the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). Establishing a working group on women and peace and security might be useful and a good option in that regard. It is our belief that integrating the gender perspective across the United Nations system will keep in view geographical, cultural and ethnic factors. Adequate resources should also be mobilized to that effect. The active involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations is a sine qua non. We are of the view that the role of the media in enhancing the integration of women in peace processes is quite significant.

In conclusion, let me underline that ending impunity is a must. However, it is more important — indeed, crucial — to mobilize leadership, secure accountability, pool adequate resources, identify challenges and address root causes in protecting women and girls in wartime, as well as in peacetime.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. De Klerk (Netherlands): Our thanks go to you, Mr. President, and to Secretary Rice for having organized this important debate and for providing an opportunity for the Netherlands to make some remarks in addition to Slovenia's intervention on behalf of the European Union.

In 2000, resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security was adopted unanimously by the Council; in 2002, the Rome Statute entered into force; in 2005, the Peacebuilding Commission was established; and, most recently, the Secretary-General launched the Campaign to End Violence against Women by 2015. Despite all these developments, little has changed on the ground. Sexual violence against women in conflict continues unabated and is at unacceptable levels. The incidence of rape is on the increase.

For the Netherlands Government, women's empowerment is a top priority. Women's rights are everyone's concern. The Netherlands is therefore taking a firm stand against the horrific violations of women's rights and human dignity that are taking place in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. That is why the Netherlands supports the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. Also, last December, the Netherlands Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Interior and 15 civil society organizations agreed on a national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). An increasing number of Member States are elaborating similar action plans. We now need to focus on implementation. We need to join forces. What should we do?

First, we need to target men. Gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be achieved without the involvement of men. Men need to talk to men, and they have to speak openly to militia leaders, gang leaders and sometimes the generals to be better role models. If we want sexual violence to end, we need to raise awareness among men about the consequences of their actions. In situations of conflict, boys and men are constantly confronted with models of violent masculinity. Discussions should also take place between men and women, with boys and girls, within communities, to start the healing process and break the cycle of sexual violence.

Secondly, acts of sexual violence should not go unpunished. We owe this first and foremost to the numerous victims. But everyone also should know that if they commit such a crime, they will not and cannot escape justice. Justice is imperative to ending impunity. Governments need to take vigorous action. National judicial systems should be strengthened in order to ensure that such criminals are caught, tried and effectively punished. If national systems fail to bring perpetrators to justice, the International Criminal Court comes into play. The Rome Statute clearly defines rape and other forms of sexual violence, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, as crimes against humanity. Fighting impunity is also one of the key elements of the resolution on all forms of violence against women that the Netherlands and France present in the General Assembly.

Thirdly, acts of violence against women are often committed by soldiers — the very people who are supposed to provide protection. The Netherlands Ministry of Defence invests in promoting gender equality in the armed forces. Gender training is mandatory and is included in the curriculum of the School for Peace Operations. We believe that all peacekeeping troops and police contingents should be given comprehensive gender training before deployment. Moreover, gender awareness training should be mandatory for all persons in leadership positions in conflict and peace building situations, including civil, military and diplomatic representatives. Additionally, the United Nations should make an extra effort to appoint more women to senior leadership positions in peacekeeping missions. The United Nations should also vigorously implement its zero-tolerance policy. Commanders should shoulder on their responsibility and arrest perpetrators. In this respect, I would like to highlight the recent report of Save the Children United Kingdom about widespread sexual abuse of children and women by aid workers, and above all, by United Nations peacekeepers. It is intolerable that persons who should be providing assistance or protection on behalf of the international community take advantage of the situation to sexually abuse women and children.

Finally, women are not just victims. It cannot be repeated often enough that women and women's organizations have to be included in peace and reconciliation processes. They also need to be involved in formulating justice and reparation programmes, including post-rape care.

The Netherlands very much welcomes this open debate and commends the presidency of the United States for its effort to put this heinous crime so prominently on the agenda of the Council. Sexual violence is linked to peace and security. The adoption of a draft resolution co-sponsored by the Netherlands will be an important step in recognizing that link. We look forward to a report of the Secretary-General which initiates a process to ensure follow-up by the Security Council and to improve coordination of United Nations activities on the ground. Finally, we hope that this process will also include the monitoring of actions taken by parties to implement their responsibilities.

We cannot tolerate what is happening to mothers, daughters, wives and grandmothers. Sexual violence in armed conflict has to stop. It is my responsibility, it is your responsibility; it is the responsibility of us all.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Carmon (Israel): At the outset, allow me to thank the President for having convened this important debate and also to thank Secretary of State Rice for presiding over this morning's debate on such a pressing issue. I also thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership during this month of June. My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for their statements, and especially the former Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for sharing insights from his personal experience and helping us to better understand the challenges before us.

Eight years ago, the Council adopted landmark resolution 1325 (2000), which, for the first time, addressed the impact of war on women. Israel continues to support the full implementation of this resolution. While progress has been made in some aspects, much more work needs to be done. One aspect in particular, which is the basis of today's debate, calls on parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and emphasizes the responsibility of States to put an end to impunity.

While sexual violence in armed conflict has occurred throughout history, brutal and systematic rape has become increasingly commonplace in some conflict and post-conflict areas. Moreover, sexual violence as a weapon of war is now perpetuated with almost universal impunity in some conflicts. Such actions not only constitute gross violations of human rights, but they also undermine confidence in peace processes and raise huge barriers to reconciliation.

While the international community has recognized that sexual violence can amount to a war crime, crimes against humanity, or constitutive acts with respect to genocide, numerous challenges remain with respect to ending sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

One particular obstacle is victims' reluctance to come forward. Survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence often feel ostracized, as they are forced to assume guilt and shame. This silence not only harms the victims and their families, but also leads to faulty statistics. Sources in the field confirm that, indeed, the number of incidents of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict is greatly underreported. Hence victims must be empowered to reclaim their human dignity. States should enforce the rule of law, bring the perpetrators to justice and end the cycle of impunity.

Similarly, a change in societal attitudes and norms regarding sexual violence must be effected, beginning with, as I just mentioned, the bringing of perpetrators to justice. Ending impunity will also encourage victims to come forward to seek justice and rehabilitation. At the same time, we must educate the world's children, at the earliest stages of life, on the rights, dignity and worth of every human being, without regard to their gender.

At the recent Wilton Park conference, recommendations were made that sexual violence be viewed as a security issue and that the international community should identify the circumstances under which sexual violence is a threat to national and international peace and security. In this context, the Council can play a greater role in ensuring that peacekeeping mandates specifically refer to the prevention of sexual violence, that peacekeepers are appropriately trained and informed about sexual violence and that sanctions and other tools are used against perpetrators. In this regard, my delegation fully supports the Secretary-General's call for peacekeepers to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

Indeed, resolution 1804 (2008) of 13 March 2008, which imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on individuals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who commit serious violations of international law, including sexual violence against children, is a good example of how the Council can act more effectively. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported more than 32,000 registered cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the province of South Kivu, Democratic People's Republic of the Congo, alone.

Lastly, we must consider the effects of sexual violence not only on the victims, but also on the children born of mass rape, sexual slavery and sexual exploitation. The impact of armed conflict on children born of rape and exploitation has economic, health and social implications that must be addressed.

Sexual violence is not an inevitable outcome of conflict. It can be stopped. States, regional bodies, non-governmental organizations and even individuals all have specific roles to play in seeing that an end is put to this detestable practice.

The Council, in particular, can focus on reporting on sexual violence and seek to fully implement resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. In that context, my delegation welcomes and is pleased to co-sponsor the draft resolution currently before the Council. For its part, Israel pledges to continue to fully implement resolution 1325 (2000) and to work to promote women's rights in all of its political and development work. Doing so, in concert with global efforts, will help to build and sustain an international commitment to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict situations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): I have the honour of delivering the following statement on behalf of all five Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden — each of which is sponsoring the draft resolution today.

First of all, allow me to thank the United States presidency of the Security Council for having organized this open debate.

Women are often victims of armed conflict, but they can also play a central role in preventing and resolving violent conflict as actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The ongoing high incidence of horrific sexual violence against women and girls in conflicts demands the attention of the international community as a human rights matter and as a question of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. It is an issue that has a direct bearing on peace and security, and it is therefore very timely and appropriate that the Security Council is addressing the issue once again. Landmark resolution 1325 (2000) continues to require full implementation.

It is clear that the use of rape and sexual violence exacerbates conflicts and also perpetuates them long after active hostilities are over. Such crimes inflict indelible scars on individuals, families and societies, which makes reconciliation and peacebuilding much more difficult. The scars of sexual violence on the psyche of the victims, their families, the children it often results in, and even the perpetrators, are the explosive remnants of war of the mind, erupting unpredictably, doing long-term damage and making reconstruction of a sustainable peace very difficult indeed.

A climate of impunity on sexual violence continues to exist. We must all join forces to end impunity for such crimes. The Security Council should respond urgently to incidents of sexual violence in conflicts and bring measures to bear to ensure that parties to armed conflict understand clearly that they will pay a heavy price for employing or permitting sexual violence. All Member States must do their part in ensuring that individuals suspected of such crimes are brought to justice in accordance with the necessary legislation at the national level. We also call on States to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court, whose Statute explicitly states that rape and other forms of sexual violence can be prosecuted as war crimes or crimes against humanity. Amnesties should not extend to crimes of sexual violence.

Clear guidance for peacekeeping missions is also needed on how to make operational the mandate to protect civilians, including women and girls, from sexual violence. That approach calls for strong and specific mandates from the Security Council, as well as sufficient means and more comprehensive reporting by the United Nations system. There is a need to make full use of available expertise, including from human rights mechanisms such as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

All Member States should ensure that training of peacekeepers includes training on resolution 1325 (2000). Furthermore, it is vital that peacebuilding and reconstruction plans include comprehensive victim-protection and support mechanisms, such as shelters for the victims and their families and gender units within the police.

A key element in ensuring the protection of women and girls from sexual violence during conflicts and in post-conflict situations is the participation of women in decision-making processes in all areas and at all levels. Whether it involves practical protection measures, such as the gathering of fuel in safety, or more complex issues, such as the reintegration of combatants into society, the input and experiences of women are essential to success and sustainability.

The participation of women is therefore directly relevant to the maintenance of peace and security. In addition to increasing the presence of women on military and police forces, new avenues must be explored on how to deploy more women in peacekeeping missions, including by establishing civilian observer components. Stronger efforts must be made by the United Nations to include women in discussions on the management and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, including in rebuilding societies, security sector reform, transitional justice and post-conflict political and economic processes.

The Secretary-General and relevant United Nations bodies should also redouble their efforts to recruit women to high-level positions. The United

Nations system as a whole should intensify its efforts to recruit more women at all levels. The same appeal goes out to all States Members of the United Nations. It is our responsibility to ensure that the United Nations has a solid base from which to recruit.

The Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping missions should continue and be strengthened. There must be no impunity for peacekeepers either. Again, wider participation by women in such missions would help. The highly successful Indian women's police corps in Liberia is encouraging in this regard, as is the high percentage of women in the group of Nigerian police that Nordic and African police have jointly trained for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. It is also important to provide appropriate and recurrent training to all personnel involved in peacekeeping operations, including on ethical conduct and the zero-tolerance policy.

Regional bodies are becoming increasingly important actors under the mandate of the Security Council in addressing regional issues of peace and security. Such bodies should be closely linked to the discussions and decisions in relation to women, peace and security. The Secretary-General is encouraged to take a leading role in this matter.

The Security Council should seriously consider the establishment of a working group to monitor conflict situations where sexual violence is widely or systematically used as a weapon of war, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan. Such a working group could assist the Council in reacting rapidly to urgent cases and making proposals on appropriate actions, including emergency obstetric and other sexual and reproductive health services and measures to prevent and treat HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, psychosocial support, as well as early measures to enforce the rule of law and crime victims' access to justice.

We support the proposal made by the United States in its concept paper that Security Council mandates should be strengthened to prevent sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and provide greater protection for women and girls from widespread and systematic attacks by parties to armed conflicts. This should be dealt with systematically both when mandates for ongoing operations come up for renewal and when mandates for new operations are adopted.

We further encourage the Council to follow up on the recommendation by the Secretary-General of developing a monitoring mechanism to improve its contribution to preventing and redressing violence against women in armed conflict.

Finally, all the Nordic countries have completed or are in the final stages of completing national implementation plans for resolution 1325 (2000) and encourage other Member States to do the same, as a matter of urgency. We also suggest that lessons learned from countries that have such a plan be used in supporting other countries in preparing their own plans.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Onemola (Nigeria): On behalf of the Nigerian delegation, I would like to commend the United States presidency of the Security Council for having initiated this open debate on women and peace and security, with a focus on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Let me reiterate my delegation's full appreciation of the concern raised in the concept paper on the endemic nature of sexual violence against women in situations of armed conflict, in particular the use of rape as a weapon of war.

My delegation views violent sexual acts such as rape, sexual assault, sexual slavery, forced marriages and forced prostitution are crimes against humanity. For us, these crimes are as despicable as they are condemnable, and it does not matter whether they are committed in time of peace or in time of war. Such crimes affect not only the victims, but also families and entire communities. They traumatize people and degrade lives, leaving behind stigma, humiliation and social exclusion.

We are equally worried that eight years after the adoption of landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which both serves as an action framework and reinforces other existing mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration, progress towards its implementation has been slow and uneven.

Indeed, the objectives of the resolution, including the need to enhance women's participation in decision-making, integrating gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations, protecting women from gender-based violence and mainstreaming gender into United Nations programme mechanisms, remain largely unfulfilled. The Nigerian delegation therefore welcomes this new milestone resolution, to be adopted later, as a follow-up to resolution 1325 (2000).

However, similar to resolution 1325 (2000), the critical challenge is how to ensure its steady and widespread implementation, particularly in conflict and post-conflict areas.

In Africa, the most significant achievements under resolution 1325 (2000) have taken place in post-conflict environments where women now enjoy considerably enhanced role in decision-making. Strengthened by the African Union's 2005 Protocol on the Rights of Women and the 2004 Heads of States Solemn Declaration on Gender Equity in Africa, a number of countries have scaled up women's participation in politics and decision-making.

Through specific measures such as a gender quota and a minimum threshold, some countries have accelerated the integration of women into national decision-making processes. Increasingly, women are also being included in national and continental peace and security initiatives.

Nigeria has signed and ratified the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. It has also taken special measures to guarantee the participation of women in governance and decision-making. At both the federal and State levels, efforts are being made to outlaw discriminatory customary or traditional practices that are harmful to the physical and mental health of women and girls.

The federal Government is also working closely with traditional rulers and non-governmental and faith-based organizations to change long-held attitudes and negative perceptions about women and to inculcate in young men respect for the fundamental rights of women and girls. School curricula and public enlightenment campaigns are also focusing on positive gender values, including the promotion of gender equality in all spheres.

The cumulative effect of those initiatives has led to a significant increase in the literacy levels of women and girls and in the number of women pursuing careers in male-dominated occupations. The country's national health policies and plans have also become more gender-sensitive, and, in the case of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, due consideration of the special needs of women have become standard policy objectives. Nigeria has also made remarkable progress in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals as they relate to women and children.

Notwithstanding these modest efforts, the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in Africa's conflict environments remains fitful. The most critical challenge, as we see it, is the concrete implementation of special measures to protect women and children against sexual violence and the prosecution of those responsible for large-scale violations of women's rights.

Another important challenge is how to institutionalize gender-sensitive policies through the domestic implementation of relevant international conventions and mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action to prevent violence against women.

In addition, the political will necessary for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) at the national and regional levels is not evident in many cases. The fact that there is no requirement in place to ensure the universal observance of relevant conventions and principles has created further room for inconsistency among States.

My delegation considers it imperative that these challenges be seen as constituting lessons learned that should guide the United Nations as it seeks to put an end to this unconscionable aspect of armed conflict. To meet these challenges, the international community must have a clear understanding of the multidimensional nature of the problem to enable it to take remedial action, as appropriate.

Our responsibilities must include preventing sexual violence against women, providing protection for them, assisting and caring for the children born of rape, including those who are victimized by the culture of impunity. Indeed, it is our responsibility to comfort and heal the communities savaged by these crimes.

More importantly, we must strengthen punitive measures so that perpetrators and those responsible for breaches are brought to justice. To enhance such measures, there is a need for greater participation by women in the civil and military components of multilateral peace support operations.

We would also like to see gender sensitive training imparted to male civil and military personnel to foster the awareness of gender issues. The need to integrate gender perspectives and training into peacekeeping in Africa is critical, considering that well over 80 per cent of United Nations peacekeepers are currently deployed in Africa.

I have elaborated on some of the challenges we face in protecting women from sexual violence in situations of conflict. There are more. For instance, we also need to strengthen dissemination, sensitization and monitoring mechanisms in conflict zones. Conflict monitoring and early warning systems are also needed to help avert the prevalence of sexual violence during and after conflicts. There is also a need to ensure effective monitoring of the implementation of humanitarian assistance in camps where women have been known to be especially vulnerable.

Health and education programmes should be developed to deal with the effects of sexual violence, such as HIV/AIDS and psychological trauma. Additionally, it is necessary to coordinate the efforts of the relevant agencies and bodies involved in these efforts by identifying the various actors, programmes and activities relative to resolution 1325 (2000) in Africa.

It is also important to make a clear commitment to move the implementation of the resolution forward. In this regard, we support the call for the Secretary-General to periodically report to the Security Council on the use of sexual violence against women in situations of armed conflict. We also invite the Secretary-General to utilize existing regional and subregional resources such as the Economic Community of West African States early warning systems and security architecture to strengthen the protection of women.

We also call on the United Nations to take a more strategic view of this problem, with clear, action-oriented commitments to ensure measurable improvements in the lives of victims.

The challenges we have outlined thus far are daunting, but they are well within our capacity to address. We can prevent sexual violence and protect victims because we all have a good idea what the problems are, and their physical and social costs.

My delegation believes that, by working together, we can also make perpetrators account for their misdeeds. Today's discussion is, therefore, a welcome first step.

Once again, we thank the United States delegation for initiating this dialogue and for laying before us a very helpful draft resolution. My delegation can associate itself with the draft resolution, and we expect others to do the same.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): I commend the United States presidency on the initiative of convening this open thematic debate on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), and express appreciation to Ms. Rice for her participation and leadership.

This debate is rather timely, as we are witnessing an increase in the reporting of cases of violence against women around the globe. In the case of armed conflicts, the shocking images broadcast by the media are deeply disturbing and attest to the gravity of the problem. It is simply despicable. Rape and all other forms of sexual abuse must be vehemently condemned, no matter their purpose, and perpetrators punished.

Our collective consternation and indignation must lead to action. If we are to successfully face this most daunting challenge, we need to design and implement practical, concrete measures to adequately address the issue, with the involvement of the international community as a whole.

Current international instruments provide an adequate framework and the necessary basis for such work. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols are all important references in the effort we need to undertake. Also relevant are the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and pertinent instruments of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) must play a central role in such a strategy. It should be carried out in conjunction with that of all General Assembly resolutions on violence against women, the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the 1974 General Assembly Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, in accordance with which all forms of repression and cruel and inhuman treatment of women and children committed by belligerents in the course of military operations or in occupied territories shall be considered criminal.

Our common efforts on the ground can also benefit from the accumulated knowledge, experience and expertise of the United Nations system, in particular the relevant agencies, programmes and funds of the Organization. They are invaluable partners in a strategy to combat violence against women in armed conflicts.

Ending impunity must also be part of our collective efforts. No woman or girl victim of sexual violence can reconstruct her life unless the cycle of recurrence is broken. Beyond a lack of respect for the human being, impunity signals the continuation of a horrendous crime, which has multiplying negative effects on family members and the community as a whole.

For that reason, we must strengthen the crucial role played by the International Criminal Court in ensuring accountability and punishing perpetrators of rape and other forms of gender-related crimes and crimes of sexual violence, all considered crimes against humanity, as defined in the Rome Statute.

An effective response to violence against women requires a comprehensive approach in which peace and security concerns are integrated into a human-rights-based perspective. In that regard, empowering women and girls must be at the centre of any effort to address gender-based violence. The overall situation of women and girls will improve only if equal participation in decision-making at all levels is ensured.

In the specific case of armed conflicts, the full-fledged participation of women in peacebuilding efforts is critical. In this respect, more interaction is necessary between the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, under Article 65 of the Charter. We should also make full use of the possibilities of cooperation within the Peacebuilding Commission, which can contribute to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). As we see in the country-specific case of Guinea-Bissau, peacebuilding can greatly benefit from women's perspectives and actions.

In the Americas, Brazil is involved in an initiative of South-South cooperation carried out within the scope of the Brazilian contribution to the consolidation of peace in Haiti. This initiative, based on our domestic experience, supports the implementation of the Haitian national plan to prevent violence against women and to address the needs of women victims of sexual violence. It is developed through the exchange of experts and good practices, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund and OXFAM.

In concluding, I reiterate Brazil's political and practical commitment to international efforts designed to end all forms of violence against women. My delegation hopes that the Council's adoption of the draft resolution, "Women and peace and security: sexual violence in situations of armed conflict", will help us to attain that goal.

The President: I call on the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the United States for organizing today's open debate and giving us the opportunity to speak on this very important issue.

Sexual violence in armed conflict shows a very serious gap in the protection of civilians that was rightly recognized and addressed in resolution 1325 (2000). We look forward to the adoption today of the draft resolution, of which we are co-authors, affirming that the prevention of acts of sexual violence can contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

We are deeply troubled that sexual violence against women and girls is still prevalent in situations of armed conflict. Such conduct is unacceptable, and even more so when committed by peacekeeping personnel.

Switzerland has adopted an action plan for national implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), and it attaches the highest priority to combating gender-based and sexual violence in the context of armed conflict.

Practical measures are urgently needed in order to strengthen prevention of and protection against sexual violence. To this end, the following four priority lines of action should be considered.

First, Switzerland stresses the importance of fighting against impunity. Acts of sexual violence must not go unpunished. The prosecution of persons suspected of having committed such acts is, first and foremost, the task of States. However, when States are unwilling or unable to prosecute acts of sexual violence amounting to war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, such cases must be referred to the International Criminal Court. The Court clearly has a crucial role to play in fighting impunity.

It is therefore essential to build up national law enforcement capacities to ensure that States are able to prosecute the perpetrators of sexual violence. Without improved understanding of the root causes, the mechanisms and the consequences of acts of sexual violence, the perpetrators of gender-based and sexual violence will continue to enjoy impunity.

Furthermore, disciplinary measures at the unit commander level cannot be a substitute for military criminal prosecution.

Secondly, systematic gender training should be given to personnel working in the security sector, including those in the armed forces, police and justice systems, as well as United Nations personnel. Security personnel must be able to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to the different security needs of women and men. It is therefore crucially important that senior management personnel be included in gender training programmes to ensure that dealing with sexual violence against women forms an integral part of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. We welcome the specific references to the matter in the draft resolution.

Thirdly, the Security Council should consider establishing a monitoring mechanism to increase accountability and ensure the integration of resolution 1325 (2000) into country-specific and related thematic work. To this end, the Council should also set up a structure for obtaining timely, accurate and reliable information on sexual violence committed in situations of armed conflict. United Nations field missions could be entrusted with this task and thus serve as an early warning system.

In addition, the Security Council could ask the Secretary-General to submit reports on best practices, based on the expertise of specialized agencies or programmes, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women and UNICEF, and take into account the security assessments of local and international women's organizations.

Fourthly, the Security Council may wish to consider the problem of sexual violence against women and girls, as referred to in resolution 1325 (2000), in conjunction with resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1674 (2006), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict.

Finally, Switzerland supports implementation of the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on this issue and the establishment of conduct and disciplinary units in all peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services should be strengthened. The goal is clear: all United Nations personnel — military or civilian — must be trained in the highest standards of conduct and be held responsible for maintaining them.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Kavanagh (Ireland): I am grateful to the Council for the opportunity to address it on the subject of women and peace and security. My Government commends the United States presidency of the Security Council, under your able leadership, Mr. President, for the work that it has invested in this important issue.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made earlier today by the Permanent Representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

Eight years on from the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), it is indeed time to assess progress towards achieving its major goals. The resolution has helped to promote the equal participation and full involvement of women in efforts to advance peace and security. It has also sought to protect women and girls from, and indeed to prevent, gender-based violence.

However, it remains a challenge to ensure that the United Nations, both institutionally and through its individual Member States, fully implements resolution 1325 (2000). Last October the Council regretted that

> "gender-based violence, particularly rape, and other forms of sexual abuse ... remain pervasive, and in some situations have become systematic, and have reached appalling levels of atrocity." (*S/PRST/2007/40*)

Such a grave situation requires an urgent and effective response from the international community, in the first place from the Security Council.

The Irish Government, for its part, is actively engaged in promoting the role of women in conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery. The recent establishment of a major conflict-resolution dimension within our Foreign Ministry has opened further avenues for Ireland to support implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in conflict and post-conflict settings. Resolution 1325 (2000) is to be one of the three cross-cutting themes which guide the work of a new designated Conflict Resolution Unit in the Ministry. Women's participation in the Northern Ireland peace process, together with the presence of a strong research and activist base, will permit tangible lessons to be drawn and shared internationally in helping advance and implement the resolution 1325 (2000) agenda.

As Chair of the 12-member Human Security Network for the period through May next year, Ireland will focus its work on the theme of gender-based violence. In line with the Beijing Platform for Action, the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence is a prominent feature of Ireland's aid policy and activities overseas, and of our National Women's Strategy at home.

In 2004, in response to reports particularly of rape and sexual violence in the conflict in Darfur, Ireland established a national Joint Consortium on Gender-Based Violence. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has lent her valuable support as a patron. This unique body marks the first time in my country that human rights, development and humanitarian agencies have cooperated with Government agencies, including those in uniform, to confront collectively the issue of gender-based violence. Training on gender equality and protection from such violence is provided to Irish peacekeepers at the United Nations Training School Ireland, in our Defence Forces Training Centre.

We support the leading role of the United Nations in ending violence against women, including through the new multi-year programme launched recently by the Secretary-General. We strongly support, in practical ways, the gender equality work of the United Nations Development Programme, including the Eight-Point Agenda for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis Prevention and Recovery.

I turn now to the very useful concept paper drawn up by the United States presidency of the Council in preparation for today's debate. It correctly identifies three priority areas for consideration: understanding the problem; prevention and protection; and consequences for accused perpetrators.

As far as understanding the problem is concerned, Ireland encourages the Security Council to recognize that sexual and other forms of gender-based violence in conflict situations have direct and significant relevance to the maintenance of international peace and security. Accordingly, in our view the Council should ensure systematic monitoring and analysis of such violence, and, where appropriate, take steps, measures and action to address it.

We also encourage the Council to request the Secretary-General systematically to include in all reports on conflict situations comprehensive information about acts of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, against women and girls. Moreover, Ireland encourages the Council to request the Secretary-General to reflect on ways to improve the level and quality of such reporting, using benchmarks, indicators and monitoring mechanisms.

On prevention and protection, Ireland would encourage the Council to request the Secretary-General to report to it on a heightened engagement of the United Nations in stopping gender-based violence in conflict situations. Such a report or study could draw on United Nations action already under way and on activities of non-governmental organizations and women's groups at the local, national and international levels. Ireland supports the call for the appointment of an independent expert to lead such a study.

We would also encourage the Council to ensure that women at the local level can actively participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of strategies and programmes to meet their security needs, interests and concerns.

Ireland believes that there ought to be consequences for perpetrators. Accountability by State and non-State actors should be ensured, including through effective prosecution and punishment.

Security sector reform and capacity-building for police and the judicial sector are also called for in this connection.

The inclusion of sexual violence offences in the Statutes of the ad hoc international criminal tribunals, and the considered jurisprudence of those tribunals, has, over a short space of time, progressively developed the law in this area in many important respects. Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence are now included within the definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity found within the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Council can, of course, refer a situation for investigation by the Prosecutor of the Court — an institution which Ireland fully supports.

There should be wider application of best practices for effective prevention and prosecution of sexual crimes committed in situations of armed conflict. Council mandates for conflict situations should provide that local commanders and their superiors in the military chain of command of armed parties to conflict can be held accountable. All too often, military commanders and other superiors fail to take necessary and reasonable steps within their control either to prevent sexual violence against civilians or to punish the perpetrators of such crimes. Military commanders and other superiors should be held accountable for such serious acts of omission on their part. Impunity can be reduced by ensuring that women are involved to the greatest extent possible in peace negotiations and in any associated amnesty provisions.

In conclusion, Ireland welcomes the intended adoption later today of a draft resolution, which we are pleased to co-sponsor, on this important issue. We believe that it should help to empower women to fully participate in the prevention, management and resolution of conflict. It must be effectively implemented to ensure that countless women and girls in conflict situations receive more adequate and effective protection from sexual violence.

Adoption of today's draft resolution will recognize that the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is a threat to sustainable international peace and security. And, under the law, principal responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security rests here, in this Chamber.

Ireland hopes, therefore, that the Security Council will act on its own analysis and promote with all necessary vigour wider respect for, and implementation of, its resolutions so as to halt and eliminate sexual violence against women and girls in situations of conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Normandin (Canada): First, Mr. President, on behalf of Canada I thank you for taking the initiative of this open debate. It is important that it mark the beginning of a more concentrated effort on the part of the Council to combat and prevent sexual violence.

Such violence, especially against women and girls, continues at alarming levels in many conflict and post-conflict situations, including as a deliberate weapon of war. It is high time that all involved in the maintenance of peace and security stepped up to address this issue.

Sexual and other forms of violence against civilians in conflict-affected situations can, in many circumstances, constitute a threat to international peace and security. It is more than clear in the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region, for example, that sexual violence is a security problem requiring a security response. It is imperative that the issue be addressed by the Council.

Resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, adopted in 2000, calls for special measures to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and emphasizes the need to end impunity for war crimes, including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls. Eight years later, there remain significant challenges to the full implementation of those commitments.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to the equal participation and full involvement of women in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, including in peace processes, and remind ourselves of the need to take concrete measures to increase their role in decision-making with respect to conflict prevention and resolution.

Canada was pleased to co-sponsor three weeks ago a conference on the role of military peacekeepers in addressing sexual violence. Participants in the conference came from military, police, civilian and diplomatic backgrounds. Among the conclusions that emerged very clearly were that peacekeeping missions need clear and strong mandates from the Security Council; that doctrine must be developed to provide guidance to the missions; and that the Council's monitoring of sexual violence and efforts to address it must become more systematic.

Canada has called on the Council repeatedly to establish a mechanism to monitor the integration of resolution 1325 (2000) into its daily work. We reiterate that call today. In relation to this, information on violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, should be systematically included in all relevant reports of the Secretary-General to the Council. Rigorous data collection and monitoring would increase the Council's capacity to develop effective peace support mandates that better address this violence, including by way of prevention.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada welcomes the most recent renewal of the peacekeeping mandate of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in resolution 1794 (2007), which gives the Mission a more explicit mandate for action to eliminate sexual violence. Unfortunately, the notable absence of equally strong provisions regarding sexual violence in resolutions 1795 (2008) on Côte d'Ivoire and 1812 (2008) on the Sudan, both adopted after resolution 1794 (2007), demonstrate that inconsistency in the Council's approach to sexual violence in mission mandates continues.

Canada believes that a report by the Secretary-General to the Council including recommendations to improve the United Nations response would be useful. The report should draw on the full breadth of expertise, including from the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and from non-governmental organizations. An independent expert could be appointed to lead the study.

Impunity for sexual violence against women and girls and men and boys is rampant in conflict situations. Canada urges countries to cooperate with regard to the four conflict and post-conflict situations being addressed by the International Criminal Court — namely, those in the Darfur region of the Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda — to ensure that perpetrators of serious international crimes are held responsible.

In that regard, as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, Canada strongly urges the early implementation at the domestic level of the binding Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children adopted in December 2006, which demands the guarantee that sexual violence in the region shall be punishable both in time of peace and in situations of armed conflict.

In conclusion, Canada is resolved to actively support the efforts of the Security Council to combat sexual violence in conflict situations. We encourage the development of a doctrine to address and prevent sexual violence. It should now be abundantly clear to all that the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war requires an effective, timely and commensurate response by the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you very much, Mr. President, for having organized this debate.

My delegation believes that the United Nations plays an essential role in combating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. There can be no question that it is essential to bolster the work of the Organization in this area, as well as to improve its internal coordination to ensure a more effective long-term impact.

Ecuador is fully committed to this effort. We are a State party to all the relevant international instruments and have co-sponsored several General Assembly resolutions on this subject. In its own area of responsibility, the Security Council made a major contribution to this effort by adopting several resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, especially as regards women and children. More specifically, the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000), several of whose paragraphs specifically refer to the subject of this debate, namely, sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.

Several elements of the draft resolution to be adopted by the Council today are incorporated in resolution 1325 (2000), including the important role played by women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacekeeping, the issue of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations and the elimination of all types of gender-based violence, especially rape and sexual violence.

My delegation believes that, with respect to the need to request a report from the Secretary-General on this issue, such a report should deal with situations that fall under the competency of the Security Council and that are clearly inscribed on its agenda; otherwise, there could be duplication of effort, as certain resolutions of the General Assembly also call for similar reports from the Secretariat on this matter.

Ecuador believes that, despite the major efforts being made by the Council, it is urgent to achieve closer cooperation between the main organs of the United Nations — bearing in mind that the General Assembly is the universal body responsible for providing a normative framework underpinning the decisions of all States on the issue we are debating today. My delegation therefore shares the view of the President of the General Assembly that the subject of sexual violence, including that perpetrated in the course of armed conflict, should continue to be considered by the General Assembly in a systematic and ongoing manner — as was the case during this session with the consensus adoption of Assembly resolution 62/134, on the elimination of rape and other forms of sexual violence in all its aspects, including in armed conflict and similar situations — as well as in the thematic debates convened by the President of the General Assembly on the issues of human security and human trafficking. The General Assembly also addressed this issue in its annual resolution on all forms of violence against women, which was also adopted by Member States by consensus.

Ensuring an end to impunity and acknowledging that victims have rights are decisive elements in combating all forms of sexual violence against women, including sexual violence as a weapon of war. Ecuador believes in the essential role of the International Criminal Court in combating impunity, as well as in its contribution to peacebuilding processes. The international community should commit itself to ensuring that no one enjoys immunity for such crimes under any circumstances. That should be our commitment to the victims and our contribution to peace and justice.

Like other delegations, we believe that such a sensitive subject as the one before us today, which should be of concern to all countries, including Ecuador, should be considered in a comprehensive and systematic manner by all Member States. Such consideration should not be confined solely to the issue of sexual violence, but should also address all forms of violence against women and girls.

One way to prevent armed conflict and all forms of violence and discrimination they generate is to address poverty and underdevelopment head-on in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, to whose achievement all Member States committed themselves.

Ecuador will continue to cooperate with the international community to ensure that all forms of violence against women and girls, especially sexual violence, are eliminated from every country and region of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Park In-kook (Republic of Korea): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to say how very much I appreciate your timely initiative to convene this meeting.

As stated in the concept paper, recent reports indicate that brutal and systematic rape is becoming increasingly commonplace in some conflict and post-conflict situations. In fact, sexual violence in situations of armed conflict has occurred throughout history, including sexual slavery during the Second World War. It is our firm belief that the adoption of the noble Charter of the United Nations is a clear manifestation of our strong commitment to preventing the recurrence of such a brutal and categorical denial of the human rights of women. However, contrary to our call for consciousness and commitment, we have witnessed the horrifying intensity and severity of sexual violence in armed conflict, which has been exercised as a weapon of war, in particular in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Darfur.

My delegation would like to make clear its position on key issues for today's deliberations. First, with respect to the link between sexual violence and peace and security, the Republic of Korea fully recognizes that sexual violence is a security issue as well as a fundamental human rights issue.

Secondly, based on the recognition of the direct link between sexual violence and peace and security, mandates for peacekeeping operations regarding sexual violence should be further strengthened and clarified. At the same time, my delegation believes that efforts should be intensified to implement the zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations.

Thirdly, on the reporting mechanism, our delegation is of the view that the Security Council must institutionalize and systematize its consideration of sexual violence in armed conflict. For that purpose, an action plan of the Secretary-General is recommended, with priority accorded to establishing a mechanism to collect information and to reporting periodically to the Council on such situations.

Last but not least is the issue of impunity. My delegation reaffirms its support for any efforts to end impunity, recognizing that accountability is a crucial component in the process of ending the cycle of systematic sexual violence against women. We believe that referring cases to the International Criminal Court or to the tribunals will send a strong and effective message to the perpetrators, as ending impunity is a critical element of a comprehensive approach to the quest for sustainable peace, justice, truth and national reconciliation. Furthermore, amnesty should not be granted to the perpetrators of sexual violence. We are also of the view that, in addition to ensuring, by putting an end to impunity, that individuals are held responsible, the responsibility of the State for the situation and for the protection of victims should also be further enhanced.

Before concluding my statement, I would like to draw the attention of the Council to the issue of children in armed conflict, given the daunting reality that a large percentage of victims of sexual violence in armed conflicts are children. I would like to recall that the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on children in armed conflict, expressing its readiness to review the relevant provisions of resolution 1612 (2005) with a view to further increasing the efficiency of its action for the protection of children from sexual violence in armed conflict. We look forward to substantive progress in that regard.

My delegation fully supports and is pleased to co-sponsor the draft resolution to be adopted today.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Ms. Rovirosa (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico welcomes the convening of this important open debate on women and peace and security because it gives us the opportunity to present our views on the matter.

Gender equality, progress towards the empowerment of women and the promotion of international peace and security are essential elements of my country's foreign policy. Mexico recognizes that the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) constitutes a milestone in gender mainstreaming in connection with peace and security.

Nonetheless, we are concerned by the limited progress that has been made in this area. We continue to witness recurring cases of widespread and systematic sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. The international community cannot remain inactive given this alarming situation. Such abominable acts of sexual violence constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity when they are committed as part of a generalized and systematic campaign against a civilian population, as stated by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

For that reason, Mexico joins with the Council in demanding the immediate and complete cessation of all acts of sexual violence. We cannot tolerate such abuses, whereby women and children continue to be the principal victims of deliberate attacks by armed groups and armies.

However, if that appeal is to be morally effective, it is necessary to put an end to incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel, in particular peacekeepers. Mexico believes that, although the United Nations has made progress in developing standards of conduct for peacekeeping personnel and in the strategy to protect and support victims of exploitation and sexual abuse committed by United Nations personnel, greater efforts must be made to ensure that we have an effective international response mechanism that can undertake timely action to deal with cases of gender violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. Mexico reiterates that we must continue to develop and implement mandatory training programmes on gender issues for United Nations personnel involved in peacekeeping operations and in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Mexico reiterates its unequivocal rejection of the use of sexual violence as a strategy of war and joins the Council's call on all States to bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice. Likewise, we agree that effective measures must be taken to prevent and respond to acts of widespread or systematic sexual violence in order to contribute to international peace and security.

We hope that the report that has been requested of the Secretary-General through the draft resolution before the Council will clearly identify practical proposals regarding strategies to minimize the vulnerability of women and girls to this type of violence. It is essential that our political will to eliminate sexual violence in situations of armed conflict be reflected in concrete outcomes. We cannot allow more time to pass. We have a moral obligation to act now, in a decisive manner.

Mexico is a staunch promoter of international humanitarian law. My country believes that the use of sexual violence, because of its very serious humanitarian consequences, together with the use of weapons that are excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects, such as antipersonnel mines and cluster munitions, should be excluded entirely from all military doctrines.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): Austria warmly welcomes and highly appreciates the initiative of the United States presidency and fully supports the measures contained in the draft resolution to be adopted later today. We are, as the Council is aware, very pleased to be a sponsor of this important draft resolution.

The issue of women and peace and security is a foreign policy priority for Austria. In the past eight years, visible progress has been made in the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). We now have a set of clear rules under international law to prevent violence against women, including sexual violence in armed conflict. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out in today's debate, the prevalence and brutality of acts of sexual violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations around the world have reached a level requiring urgent attention and action by the international community.

We all agree that sexual violence is often not only a mere manifestation of war but, rather, a deliberate tactic of warfare. That practice and the adverse effects it has on peace processes, reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction make it clear that sexual violence against women is indeed a security threat.

We highly appreciate the important efforts already under way within the framework of the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. We also strongly support the system-wide campaign to end violence against women and hope to see significant progress leading up to 2015. Recent measures strengthening the enforcement of a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers and related personnel constitute a major contribution. The United Nations must lead by example. Sexual violence is unacceptable under all circumstances.

Women must have a seat and a voice at negotiation tables. Regrettably, women's representation in peace processes is still the exception. In its national action plan on implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), Austria has made a clear commitment to lobby worldwide for women's participation in all peace efforts. Conferences in Vienna last year, bringing together women leaders from the Middle East, as well as from Serbia and Kosovo, were important opportunities to establish networks which allow for the multiplication of women's voices and for enhancing influence.

We are encouraged by the Secretary-General's recent appointments of women as special representatives and envoys and to leading positions in the Secretariat. We hope to see more such appointments in the future and reiterate our call for Member States to support, encourage and nominate women for such positions.

Despite clear rules under international law outlawing sexual violence, perpetrators still largely go unpunished. This situation demands further action by the Security Council to strengthen the rule of law in order to end impunity. Unfortunately, some of the existing mechanisms and tools of the Council have been underutilized. We therefore call on the Council to make full use of the range of measures and tools available, including the imposition of targeted measures and referrals to the International Criminal Court. We also call on Member States to strengthen the rule of law and fully utilize accountability mechanisms to bring to justice perpetrators of violations against women and girls.

In this context, I would like to draw the Council's attention to our initiative on the Security Council and the rule of law, which contains 17 concrete recommendations on how the Security Council could strengthen the rule of law. Recommendations 8 and 9 specifically address the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations. The report was recently issued as a United Nations document (S/2008/270, annex) and is available in all official languages.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by thanking the United States presidency for having organized this open debate, which clearly reflects the Security Council's commitment to full implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and, in particular, the growing concern regarding the use of various forms of sexual violence against the civilian population, particularly women and girls, in conflict and post-conflict situations.

In the framework of a human rights perspective, Argentina places high priority on the situation of women and girls in conflict situations, and on the participation of women as key protagonists in peace processes and in peacebuilding.

Resolution 1325 (2000) provides a legal framework which allows for the effective participation of women at the national and international levels, within the broader and indispensable legal framework comprising the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century (General Assembly resolutions S-23/2 and S-23/3), as well as other relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, specifically Assembly resolutions 58/185, on the in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, and 62/134 on eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations.

As a reflection of this deep commitment, Argentina is one of four countries carrying out the pilot programme for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and has started to take concrete actions, including the first regional workshop for the development of a gender policy for peace operations, held in our country in May with a view to strengthening alliances at all levels to move forward on gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations.

In this regard, we would like to note that Argentina has fully incorporated United Nations recommendations on gender in all aspects of its participation in peacekeeping operations. The Argentine Joint Peacekeeping Operations Training Centre has also incorporated a gender perspective in its doctrine, both at the administrative level and in the curricula of its training programmes.

As of January 2008, 26 Argentine women were participating in peacekeeping missions, particularly the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. In 2007, 36 per cent of our participants in White Helmet humanitarian missions were women, a figure which is expected to reach 43 per cent in 2008.

Increasing numbers of reports from the field alert us on the use of sexual violence as a political or military tool in some current conflicts. A regrettable chapter of our past has shown us that rape and other heinous forms of sexual violence can be used by agents of the State as a tool to spread terror, and to torture and degrade those whom it considers their "enemies".

Sexual violence as a method of warfare is categorically prohibited. The widespread and systematic use of sexual violence is a grave violation of international law, particularly in the light of the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court and by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Considering these realities, Argentina is persuaded of the need urgently to adopt effective measures to prevent and respond to such acts of sexual violence against civilian populations, which will significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. Such measures should include, inter alia, the protection of civilians, in particular women and girl children; the training of military and security personnel; the adoption and effective enforcement of appropriate legislation; and community-based work and care for the victims.

In order to ensure that effective measures are adopted, we consider that a report of the Secretary-General would be particularly useful. It should organize and analyse the information available to the United Nations system, with a specific focus on the shocking phenomenon of sexual violence as a political and military tool.

Lastly, Argentina is of the view that any effective response to this question must be two-pronged: promotion of full respect for the human rights of victims and an end to impunity for perpetrators. In this regard, we believe that the draft resolution before the Council today would have benefited from a strengthened legal framework, particularly with a firm reaffirmation of the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court, the main tool available to the international community today to ensure that nobody can with impunity commit heinous crimes, such as those which we are considering today.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Blum (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for your initiative in organizing this debate on the subject of women and peace and security. We particularly appreciate the presence of the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, who presided over our work this morning.

We would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, Mrs. Olubanke King-Akerele; and Major-General Patrick Cammaert, former Commander of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) for their briefings.

Colombia rejects all forms of sexual violence, including rape and other forms of sexual abuse. On that basis, my country has been reporting on the progress it has achieved in implementing resolution 61/143 on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Colombia has also been fulfilling the commitments set out in resolution 1325 (2000) and has submitted the corresponding reports pursuant to that resolution, which has allowed us to raise awareness of the important role of women in the prevention and settlement of conflicts.

In Colombia, the Presidential Office for Women's Equality has strengthened the incorporation of the gender dimension in all Government bodies, particularly through the policy on "Women Building Peace and Development". That policy reflects the Government's determination to include gender mainstreaming, in a cross-cutting manner, in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

In addition, the military relies on a comprehensive human rights and international humanitarian law policy and have launched a programme aimed at strengthening reproductive and sexual rights and gender equity within that institution.

Also noteworthy is the role of the National Commission for Redress and Reconciliation, which was established for the purpose of facilitating peace processes and the individual or group reintegration of members of illegal armed groups. The Commission seeks to guarantee the rights of victims to truth, justice and redress. It has incorporated a gender perspective in its work as well as the recommendations contained in resolution 1325 (2000).

On the basis of the efforts of the Commission, among other factors, and its work with the Office of the Attorney General and with women victims, crimes associated with sexual violence are being addressed in a more effective manner. As an example, trials are being held that, in addition to their purpose of prosecuting the perpetrators of such crimes, also contribute to preventing them and to protecting the victims. Many of those victims, in particular women, have come forward to denounce criminal actions such as sexual violence.

In addition, the Office of the High Adviser for Social and Economic Reintegration has provided humanitarian assistance to more than 2,600 women who had been partners of members of illegal armed groups and who have received benefits such as physical security, shelter, food and psychosocial support. Special emphasis has been placed on the provision of support for the settlement of disputes arising from domestic violence and for the holding of workshops on the issue of respect for and the integrity of women.

Colombia will continue to follow this course of action, with particular emphasis on the areas of participation, prevention, protection and the combat against impunity, in the quest to eliminate all forms of sexual violence.

The Secretary-General's most recent report on women and peace and security highlights the role of regional organizations in the implementation of the plan of action 2008-2009 relating to resolution 1325 (2000).

My delegation would like to draw attention, in this perspective, to the high-level dialogue that took place in Chile in November 2007, at which the Latin American and Caribbean authorities charged with dealing with this subject carried out an assessment of the developments relating to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) at the national level and shared experiences on best practices. This type of activity is particularly useful in developing management and information systems that take into account each region's individual characteristics and priorities.

We would like also to underline the role of the Inter-American Commission on Women, as the relevant body of the Organization of American States in this field, as well as its important efforts in the quest to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

My delegation notes with interest the increasing participation of women in tasks related to peacekeeping. The example of the all-female police contingent from India in the United Nations Mission in Liberia constitutes a point of reference on progress in this area and makes a positive contribution to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). We echo the support expressed for initiatives aimed at ensuring a higher percentage of women in peacekeeping forces.

Lastly, my delegation would like to underscore how important it is that the action of the Security Council on issues related to sexual violence be focused on situations where peacekeeping missions are deployed and that are on the Council's agenda. This includes due regard for the continuation of zero-tolerance policies for sexual exploitation and abuse in such operations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mrs. Kafanabo (United Republic of Tanzania): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you for organizing this open debate on women and peace and security. By focusing our discussion on sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, the Security Council will be sending an authoritative message of condemnation to those parties that are perpetrating or condoning such acts in conflict situations as well as a message of hope to the victims. This debate is also contributing to defining an international code against sexual violence in conflict situations.

I thank the President of the General Assembly, the Deputy Secretary-General and all the presenters for their informative presentations on this subject earlier today.

The concern for the protection of women and girls against sexual and gender-based violence has been reflected in various Security Council documents. It is unfortunate that, despite the numerous calls made to protect women and girls, there has been an escalation of systematic and brutal acts of sexual violence and abuses as calculated instruments of war against civilians, especially women and girls. The Security Council, with the support of Member States, needs to take bold measures to stop this trend. It is our expectation, therefore, that this open debate will lead to recommendations that will enable the Security Council to respond effectively to the use of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations and to galvanize concerted international action against such crimes.

It is high time that we recognized sexual violence in conflict situations as a pervasive criminal act with global repercussions. Such acts of targeted violence add new dimensions to regional and international peace and security. We call upon all parties to conflict to end these barbarous acts and to take measures to protect civilians, including women and girls.

The Security Council needs to send a clear message to parties in armed conflicts that sexual violence in any manifestation is not condoned and that stern measures will be taken against the perpetrators so as to end impunity. We thus call upon Member States to comply with their obligations to prosecute perpetrators and to support the work of the International Criminal Court in that regard.

It is unfortunate that civilians, and in particular women and girls, are increasingly being targeted in current warfare. Humanitarian law is being blatantly violated and perpetrators escape with impunity. There is thus an enormous challenge to the international community as a whole and to peacekeeping missions in particular to ensure that civilians are protected.

We are encouraged that sexual violence is included in some peacekeeping protection of civilian mandates. These mandates, however, need to be matched with political resolve and resources, doctrine and guidance. In the same vein, the national defence policies of troop-contributing countries need to be explicit and emphatic on protection of civilians, including women and girls, in the training of troops for peacekeeping missions. Equally, national laws must be robust in dealing with those responsible for such acts of violence.

Sexual violence in conflict situations needs to be addressed holistically. In that regard, efforts to encourage women to report it when they are attacked, as well as mechanisms to assist the victims, need to be in place. In addition, programmes to strengthen the rule of law need to be implemented so as to end impunity and provide justice for the victims. In the longer term, community-based interventions to address the health, psychosocial and educational needs of children and adults, including men and boys, affected by and implicated in the violence need also to be in place. This means that interventions need to be carried out during and after a conflict.

While we believe that national Governments have the primary responsibility for the protection of their nationals, the support of the international community, as appropriate, is critical in addressing sexual violence in conflict situations.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania strongly condemns all acts of sexual and gender-based violence in all their manifestations. It is in this regard that Tanzania joined in sponsoring last year's General Assembly resolution 62/134, entitled "Eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations", and is among the sponsors of the draft resolution to be adopted today. We are willing to work with the international community to end sexual and gender-based violence as well as to end impunity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Ney (Germany): Germany welcomes this open thematic debate on women and peace and security: sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. I would like to express Germany's appreciation to the United States, which currently holds the presidency of the Security Council, for this important initiative. Complementing the statement made by the Republic of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union, Germany would like to add the following remarks.

We are deeply shocked by recent, and recurring, reports indicating that brutal rapes are increasingly becoming commonplace in conflict and post-conflict situations. The pervasive and sometimes systematic use of sexual violence against women and girls, particularly rape or even gang rape and other forms of sexual abuse, does not only belong to the most serious violations of human rights. Sexual violence can also constitute a threat to international peace and security, when used or commissioned in situations of armed conflict as a method of war in order to deliberately target civilians or other protected persons or as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations.

We therefore have to recognize sexual violence as a security problem requiring a systematic security response, including through attention by the Security Council and by the International Criminal Court. We have to increase all our efforts, on all levels, to find adequate responses and to end impunity for these crimes.

In this context, Germany highly welcomes the initiative entitled Stop Rape Now: United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, launched last year, as well as the Secretary-General's campaign entitled Unite to End Violence Against Women, which he launched during the recent session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We particularly welcome the personal commitment that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon attaches to this campaign.

The adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was a milestone in creating awareness of the urgent need to protect women and girls from sexual abuse in armed conflicts, but also in acknowledging the crucial role that women can and should have in all efforts to promote peace and security.

Germany reaffirms its commitment to the full and effective implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

We just submitted a comprehensive and detailed report to the Secretariat on Germany's contributions to the individual demands of resolution 1325 (2000). This report documents a variety of measures both at national and global level, ranging from efforts to increase representation of women in all decision-making mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, to concrete projects aimed at ending violence against women. Last year, the German federal Government also presented its second action plan to combat violence against women.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is an essential part of the United Nations mandate. A coherent and effective implementation of this mandate, including resolution 1325 (2000), needs a coherent and effective United Nations gender architecture. Germany supports the strengthening of the normative and operative work of the United Nations on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

This week's informal debate in the General Assembly showed once again the broad commitment to a reform of the United Nations gender architecture. We now need concrete steps forward in order to enable the United Nations to better deliver for women and girls all around the world.

We look forward to further discussion on women and peace and security within the Security Council. The topics of gender equality and women's empowerment, and, more specifically, of sexual violence, should not only be part of an annual open debate, but should be continuously considered and mainstreamed in the daily work of the Council and in all discussions of conflict and post-conflict situations. Germany therefore welcomes the fact that information on sexual violence will now be systematically included in the Council's country situation reports. We had also supported proposals towards a specific mechanism in this regard, because we believe that effective prevention starts with systematic reporting and reliable data. We hope that the Council will return to this issue in its future discussions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mrs. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for having organized this thematic debate on women and peace and security: sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. We believe that today's discussions, like the previous debate, in October 2007 (see S/PV.5766), will be a useful contribution to the efforts to focus on the main issues contained in resolution 1325 (2000).

Kazakhstan attaches great importance to resolution 1325 (2000), which draws the attention of the international community to the crucial issue of the detrimental impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations.

My delegation once again reaffirms its commitment to the zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence against women and girls as a tool of warfare.

Since the adoption of the resolution, the Security Council has organized regular reviews to assess its implementation. Despite some progress, that implementation is still slow and uneven. As has already been pointed out by other delegations, we too agree that women's involvement in decision-making with regard to security issues and the peacebuilding process has a positive effect on the peaceful resolution of conflicts and on post-conflict rehabilitation. Having said that, my delegation fully commends the efforts aimed at increasing women's involvement in the decision-making process in the areas of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

However, as the most vulnerable group of civilians due to their gender and social status, women and girls continue to be the main victims of sexual assault during conflicts. The situation is further exacerbated as a result of the fact that gross violations against women and girls in zones of armed conflict are often concealed. Because they are stigmatized by local communities, victims usually tend to disguise information about abuse out of fear for their lives and families. There is therefore insufficient evidence to make the case against perpetrators.

In that regard, we would like to underscore the importance of developing victim protection systems similar to existing programmes for witness protection; strengthening legislation on the responsibility of perpetrators for crimes against women and girls in conflict zones; and working with local communities to disseminate information on abhorrent crimes, including sexual violence in zones of armed conflict, in order to raise local awareness and knowledge about the legal consequences of crimes.

Recognizing the fact that the consequences of violence against women and girls in conflict zones has a serious impact on physical and mental health and are of a sensitive nature, my delegation would strongly like to recommend a more vigorous expansion of the role and contribution of women in field-based operations, especially among humanitarian personnel, including medical staff.

We must nevertheless recognize that understanding about the magnitude of the problem of security and the protection of women and girls in conflict zones has been growing thanks to resolution 1325 (2000). In that regard, we would like to express our appreciation for the Secretary-General's report (S/2007/567) on women and peace and security, as well as the efforts of the United Nations system to implement resolution 1325 (2000) at all levels. Addressing sexual violations in armed conflict is not the responsibility of a given country or region alone, but a humanitarian imperative for every stakeholder. The side to a conflict that encourages the violence must be strongly condemned.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that the full and successful implementation of the resolution by all Member States will help to significantly increase protection for women's and girls' rights and dignity in zones of armed conflict, as well as to eliminate such crimes, including sexual abuses.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, and Secretary of State Rice for convening this timely and important meeting, which, in my delegation's view, is crucial and necessary at a time when women and other vulnerable groups have become the main victims of armed conflict.

Women's advancement, security and living conditions in Iraq had declined during the past three decades. Wars and economic sanctions and negligence and oppression by the former regime had eroded conditions for women. There had been systematic breaches of human rights, in particular against women, who were subject to gender-specific abuse and violence. In the past few years, thousands of Iraqi women lost their lives and suffered from terrorist acts, which have targeted the most vulnerable groups in society, namely, children, women and the elderly. More recently, terrorist groups have been recruiting and using Iraqi women to commit suicidal attacks against civilians. According to statistics, about 17 women have committed such acts. Terrorists have even used women with mental disabilities to commit suicidal attacks in a market crowded with women and children.

With regard to the new Iraq, equality between women and men and protection against discrimination were enshrined in the Transitional Administrative Law and in the new Iraqi constitution that has been adopted. However, violence against women is rooted in some traditional practices and tribal codes, and is compounded by the socio-economic and security situation in the country.

Throughout the difficulties the country has faced, Iraqi women have shown resilience, courage and determination. For the past few years, they have been playing a larger and more effective role, as they are part of the political process in the new Iraq. They hold no less than 25 per cent of parliamentary and provincial council seats.

They have recently become more empowered, with the creation of the cross-party women's caucus composed of 73 women members of parliament. In a joint effort with United Nations agencies, that party will advance the development of policies to help victims of conflict, including widows, orphans, the families of war victims and Iraqi refugees. The establishment of the cross-party women's caucus will enable Iraqi women members of parliament to emerge as more effective and influential actors in the legislature, by bridging different viewpoints held by the various parties to which they belong.

For the first time, Iraqi women have also been playing an effective role as ministers of important ministries, including those responsible for human rights, municipalities and public works, women, housing and construction and the environment.

I should also mention that the country has for the first time experienced the establishment of women's organizations, through which Iraqi women have proven their capabilities in defeating challenges by taking on difficult responsibilities on different levels. Those organizations have been playing an important role in advancing and empowering women in Iraq. My country is going through the phase of institutional reconstruction, and my Government realizes that without the effective participation and full role of women, many of the long-term goals will not be achieved.

Iraq's current political situation provides an opportunity to redress persistent violations of women's rights, as the Iraqi constitution will be further amended as part of the political process. It will open space to continue to influence the process of addressing women's rights and promoting gender equality as part of Iraq's institutional rebuilding. It is anticipated that 60 laws will be either revised or formulated, as stipulated in Iraq's new constitution, providing an unprecedented opportunity to influence further the constitution and legislation and to align them with international conventions — in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and both Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which my Government recently ratified.

The Government of Iraq, in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women, is implementing programmes and projects to promote the role of women by strengthening the role of civil society organizations in mitigating violence and by contributing to building peace in Iraq. Support for that effort is provided in line with the framework of resolution 1325 (2000), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

That partnership also includes capacity-building for women's non-governmental organizations to promote women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation.

Another programme implemented in Iraq by various United Nations agencies involves disseminating knowledge on emerging issues and innovative solutions towards conflict resolution and increasing tolerance, in order to enhance the capacity of community groups and women's non-governmental organizations that promote the culture of peace and foster dialogue among various groups.

As we are discussing sexual violence and rape as war crimes under international law, my delegation is of the view that such crimes against women should be considered as crimes against humanity, as those actions cannot find a place in any culture and should not be excused under any circumstances.

Eight years ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. Its purpose was to address the atrocities committed against women and girls during conflicts and even after peace agreements and in post-conflict situations. We agree that since the adoption of that resolution, progress towards reaching its main goals has been slow.

We believe that one of the major problems facing our endeavours to stop these crimes is the issue of shame and the social exclusion of victims. Since we are discussing the issue of data collection on rape and sexual violence, we believe that due consideration should be given to cultural differences and to awareness-raising campaigns undertaken with the help of community leaders in post-conflict situations, in particular among the most vulnerable groups in society.

Preventing and eliminating these atrocities must be the main goal of our endeavours, and to achieve that goal we must act globally. We commend the efforts of the United Nations in that regard, but we call upon all relevant United Nations agencies, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, civil society and non-governmental organizations to combine their efforts to combat these crimes and to establish early warning mechanisms to enable the international community to prevent these crimes from taking place.

We also believe that an end must be put to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes and that they should be held accountable for their actions.

To conclude, we would like to express our full support for an action-oriented resolution that will put an end to these crimes and atrocities against women and girls, and my delegation hopes that this important debate will bring this issue to the world's attention and make it globally recognized.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Nsengimana (Rwanda): My delegation welcomes this opportunity to participate in this open debate on women and peace and security and wishes to express our appreciation to the delegation of the United States for organizing the debate. We also commend the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-

General, the Deputy Secretary-General, His Excellency the Liberian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Major-General Cammaert for their briefings.

Throughout history, gender-based violence, in particular violence against women, has a component of armed conflict. In Rwanda, the 1994 genocide was marked by horrific forms of violence, particularly against girls and women. An estimated 500,000 girls and women were victims of rape by the Interahamwe, and up to two thirds of those victims were also infected with HIV by perpetrators carrying the virus. It is now evident that rape was part of the genocidal plan and part of the systematic degradation of women and of girls. This plan was then exported by members of the former Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR) and Interahamwe across our borders into the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and continues to be exacted by the ex-FAR/Interahamwe, under its new denomination the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, the Rally for Unity and Democracy (RUD-Urunana) and other militias on the women and girls of the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Fourteen years on, survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda continue to live with the effects of that legacy.

Therefore, addressing the specific protection needs of women in armed conflict remains a critical matter for the United Nations system. My delegation therefore reiterates its support for the continued implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

It is within that context that my Government has set out to elaborate a national policy on gender-based violence and violence against women. The development of that policy is situated within a national, regional and international context and is linked to peacebuilding and economic development and growth. Article II of the Rwanda genocide law stipulates that gender-based violence, violence against women and sexual violence must be dealt with in the first category under article I, as a crime of genocide or crime against humanity, punishable under article 95 of the penal code with a maximum term of life imprisonment.

Rwanda, as one of the major troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations, has a vested interest in ensuring the protection of women in situations of armed conflict. Gender-based violence and violence against women are therefore considered by the Rwanda Defence Forces as a key component of the security threat. In that respect, the gender desk at Rwanda Defence Forces headquarters devises training programmes, with the support of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), to raise awareness of gender-based violence and violence against women in the armed forces. Awareness and training on responding to gender-based violence and violence against women has now been mainstreamed into the curricula of all Rwanda's military schools and training institutions and is integral to the preparation of all Rwanda Defence Forces battalions preparing for peace missions abroad. The leadership of the Rwanda Defence Forces has also undertaken the fight against gender-based violence and violence against women as a command responsibility.

My delegation therefore calls upon the United Nations system to take concerted action on addressing the plight of women in armed conflict through enforcing resolution 1325 (2000), rejecting impunity through support to and strengthening of national jurisdictions and the provision of support to victims of sexual violence.

We also strongly believe that in order for the United Nations system to respond in a more coordinated, coherent and effective manner, urgent attention needs to be placed on strengthening the United Nations system's work on gender.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Mr. Cato (Philippines): The Philippines would like to begin by congratulating the United States and commending it for having convened this debate on the important issue of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. We thank you, Mr. President, for giving the Philippines the opportunity to address the Council on this issue.

The Philippines joins previous speakers in condemning acts of sexual violence inflicted on women and girls by parties involved in armed conflict. Sexual violence in situations of armed conflict is something to which the international community should not close its eyes. As we speak, reports on how women and girls have found themselves victims of sexual violence and on how they remain vulnerable to increased risk of violence from parties involved in armed conflicts continue to stream in from various hotspots around the world.

The sexual abuse committed against women and girls is deeply rooted in a pervasive culture of discrimination, highlighted by the unequal power equation which denies females equal status. This inequality is manifested in a number of ways during conflict, particularly through the social, political and cultural norms that identify women and girls not only as the property of men, but also as sexual objects. This inequality also finds form as a tool of war, with violence directed at women being considered an attack against the values and honour of a society.

While it is easy to see the vulnerabilities of women, there is a tendency to regard them only as victims of violence, most especially sexual violence. Unfortunately, this obscures the many positive roles that women play in conflict situations, especially as agents of peace and reconciliation, as called for under Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security.

The Philippines continues to regard resolution 1325 (2000) as an important contribution by the Security Council to addressing the complex issues affecting women in countries torn by conflict. Resolution 1325 (2000) is an instrument that brings a United Nations gender perspective to conflict analysis, monitoring and resolution. This has had a great impact on the transformative responses that are needed to address the gender dimension of conflict.

The fundamental strategy of the Philippines in pursuing the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) lies in enabling more women to systematically participate in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in post-conflict peacebuilding, while at the same time rehabilitating their communities and ensuring basic services and livelihoods. Women are empowered to take part in local peace processes by building capacities and mobilizing peace constituencies. Women in indigenous communities, for instance, are even serving as intermediaries in local peace dialogues and as mediators in the restoration of broken peace pacts. The roles that women play in addressing the issues surrounding them are critical; therefore, the Philippines remains convinced that women must be utilized as active agents in confronting gender-based violence.

The response to sexual exploitation in conflict situations necessitates a comprehensive approach. As this entails a response which should address the various dimensions of the problem, the United Nations must mobilize the entities within its system and build on their comparative advantages to address the root causes, manifestations and consequences of conflict.

The Philippines recognizes the role of the Security Council in addressing conflict in its various dimensions, including the gender dimension, to the extent that this is in accordance with the Council's mandate. It should be emphasized that, since the issue of sexual violence requires a more holistic response, including political, economic, social and cultural aspects, the Security Council's actions, which comprise only part of the response, must be coherently coordinated with the efforts of other bodies, such as the development-oriented agencies.

The Philippines also wishes to underscore the importance of the regional context in assessing and addressing conflict, as well as in coming up with the appropriate responses to the gender dimensions of conflicts. In this connection, the Philippines urges the Security Council to work closely with the relevant regional intergovernmental and civil society organizations in areas of conflict.

While the Philippines recognizes the need to urgently confront sexual violence in conflict, it believes that the Security Council must also exercise caution to ensure that it does not confront the conflict situation narrowly by focusing on palliatives to address the issue of gender violence. As sexual violence is part of the bigger context of conflict, the Security Council must see to it that it also uses its mandate mainly to assess and address this broader picture. Bearing in mind the need to evaluate the effectiveness of targeted measures and sanctions, the Security Council must be cognizant that these, if contemplated, must not exacerbate the conflict or give rise to negative consequences for the civilian population.

The Security Council can concretely contribute to gender-sensitive conflict prevention and resolution, including post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, by taking the necessary steps to put an end to impunity by going after all violators without exception. This could also be accomplished by integrating gender issues in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, incorporating the necessary gender training in the security sector and facilitating the establishment of necessary infrastructure and capacity for women's access to justice, as well as cooperative work with non-governmental organizations and other community groups.

To further address the issue of sexual violence, the Security Council could support systems for gender-sensitive monitoring of conflicts, including the collection of sex-disaggregated data and information with the engagement of national and local authorities. This is important to facilitate national ownership and accountability. The Security Council could also advocate for the inclusion of gender violence issues in peace accords and peace processes between parties to conflict.

The Philippines believes that the Security Council can help address the issue of gender violence in conflict areas by seeing to it that the design and training of peacekeeping missions include the deployment of more female police and military personnel, the necessary gender-sensitivity training by troop-contributing countries and the enforcement of a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse involving peacekeepers.

In the case of the Philippines, gender sensitivity is incorporated in the predeployment training for personnel of our armed forces and our national police whom we send out to support United Nations peacekeeping operations. As early as four years ago, the Philippines had put in place a zero-tolerance policy on misconduct, especially on sexual exploitation and abuse that could be committed by our peacekeepers. This policy of zero tolerance, which is firmly embedded in the revised policy framework and guidelines governing Philippine participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, serves as a guarantee that no Filipino peacekeeper will go unpunished for misdeeds committed in mission areas.

Finally, the Philippines, as one of the largest contributors, if not the largest contributor, of individual police officers to United Nations peacekeeping operations, could also support calls for the deployment of more female police officers, especially those experienced in handling gender violence cases. We hope that such a contribution would help to bring about better monitoring, reporting and response to cases of gender violence in conflict areas.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan): At the outset, I would like to thank the United States for having organized this open debate on a very important protection gap, that related to sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict and in post-conflict situations.

In situations of armed conflict and periods of instability, armed groups often use violence against civilians, especially women, as a deliberate tactic of war. In Afghanistan, the devastating impacts of three decades of armed conflict have particularly affected the most vulnerable part of our population, namely women and children. During this period, the basic rights of Afghan women have been undermined, even denied, due to the vicious cycles of violence which allowed groups with power to act with impunity in the face of women's vulnerability. Under the Taliban regime, Afghanistan was a graveyard for human and women's rights, where barbaric atrocities against women constantly occurred. No one can forget the images of innocent Afghan women being slaughtered in Kabul's stadium and the images of the inhuman Taliban bludgeoning women in the street for so-called unvirtuous behaviour. Today the results of widespread violence during years of conflict are still affecting the private and public spheres of women's lives in Afghanistan.

In several armed conflict situations, acts of sexual and gender-based violence have been used to humiliate and forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group. In Afghanistan, sexual violence was not a predominant method employed by armed groups in conflict, due to the strong cultural bounds within our society. However, sexual violence was used by some individuals and groups as an instrument of war.

Afghanistan recognizes that sexual and gender-based violence is a threat to international peace and security and condemns all sexual and gender-based violence committed against civilians in conflict-affected situations. We would also like to acknowledge that, in countries in armed conflict as well as in post-conflict countries, violence against women has multiple dimensions that extend beyond a sexual nature.

It has been eight years since the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1325 (2000) and about seven years since the fall of the barbaric regime of the

Taliban and the beginning of the peace process, democratization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Our vision is a peaceful and progressive nation where women and men enjoy security, equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of life.

The Government of Afghanistan has made considerable achievements in protecting women from violence and in ensuring a secure environment where their rights are protected and their participation in decision-making bodies and in the peacebuilding process is guaranteed. The fact that 28 per cent of the seats in the Afghan Assembly are held by women is testament to this claim. This places Afghanistan as the twentieth-ranked country in the world in terms of female representation in parliament.

Afghanistan has undertaken several initiatives in addressing violence against women, as embodied in its constitution, the Millennium Development Goals, the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy that was recently launched in Paris, and international treaties. The Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs is leading our efforts in achieving this goal and chairs the ministerial task force created in 2005 to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all relevant organizations, including United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Development Fund for Women, as well as to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, for assisting us in advancing the status of Afghan women.

Progress in the process that involves the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and the disbanding of illegal armed groups has contributed to minimizing violence against civilians, particularly women and children. However, the successful completion of this process will help to create an environment where women will be empowered to exercise their rights.

The Afghan Government recognizes that security sector reform is crucial to strengthening the rule of law, to ensuring the protection of women's rights, to improving law enforcement bodies and to ending the culture of impunity.

But at the same time, we would like to underscore the need for women to participate in the security sector reform process. In this regard, initial steps have been taken by the Ministry of the Interior to increase the recruitment of female law enforcement officers and to provide gender sensitivity training in the police academy. Police family response units are staffed by women who are trained to deal with domestic violence and to respond to female victims of crime.

The escalation of violence and insecurity in some parts of the country as a result of the terrorist activities carried out by the Taliban and Al-Qaida hinders the implementation of the rule of law and consequently makes women vulnerable to all forms of violence. Various methods of violence against women are used by the Taliban and Al-Qaida to intimidate, terrorize and force Afghan women to retreat from public activities and limit their access to health care, education, justice and economic and social endeavours, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan. The terrorist campaign of the Taliban and Al-Qaida has particularly affected girls' school enrolment and attendance. Schools are burned, and female teachers and students are attacked and threatened.

The legacy of the long conflict, including access to weapons, difficulty in stabilization efforts and rampant poverty, is reflected in some parts of the country in self-immolation, forced marriage, domestic and other forms of violence. In order to be successful in our efforts to eliminate these practices, we request the international community to continue its assistance so that we may strengthen our national capacity in ensuring a secure environment, improving economic and social conditions and implementing human rights and the rule of law in Afghanistan.

The protection of civilians, including women, is highlighted as an inherent part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force mission operating in Afghanistan. We would like to emphasize on the need to integrate specific strategies for the better protection of women from all forms of violence, including sexual violence. We also encourage peacekeeping forces to receive predeployment gender sensitivity training.

Sustainable peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without the participation of half of its population, namely Afghan women. Afghanistan recognizes the importance of the positive contribution of women to conflict prevention, conflict resolution and the promotion of peace and security. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon justly stated this morning, the most effective way to combat violence against women is to make women messengers of peace instead of victims of violence. That reflects our vision for Afghan women.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of El Salvador.

Mrs. Gallardo Hernández (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): El Salvador welcomes the initiative to hold an open Security Council debate on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. That resolution is a cornerstone of the call for full and equal participation of women in all peace and security initiatives, together with mainstreaming the gender perspective in the context of armed conflict, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and also in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

The resolution emphasizes the need to increase the role of women in the political participation process and in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.

El Salvador's post-conflict situation enables us to confirm that women and men experience peace and conflict in different ways and that, therefore, they have different vulnerabilities and needs and require different mechanisms to address their security.

Thus, in the context of armed conflict and in peacebuilding processes, we may wonder whether gender roles and relations differ, since men and women adapt to changes in situations according to circumstances. Resolution 1325 (2000) is thus a landmark which enables us to consider the increasing complexity of conflict situations and the transition from conflict to development in a broad and integral manner and from a gender perspective.

El Salvador recognizes that since resolution 1325 (2000) was adopted, limited progress has been made in implementing it. The results have been mixed, as confirmed by studies carried out by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, particularly the study entitled "Securing Equality, Engendering Peace: A guide to policy and planning on women, peace and security". It should be noted that this study helps facilitate the development of national action plans that are realistic and effective in implementing resolution 1325 (2000) through good practices, specific recommendations and a six-step process.

Additionally, as the debate on the gender perspective in the context of armed conflict continues, related problems come to light, such as a lack of prevention and protection, in particular for women and girls, from violence of all kinds, including sexual violence, which unfortunately is, in some cases, used as a weapon of war.

In this connection, my delegation joins other delegations and civil society organizations in requesting the Secretary-General to systematically include full information on acts of sexual violence and gender-based acts against women and girls in all reports on conflict situations.

El Salvador recognizes the need to broaden the framework of action derived from the promotion of a holistic approach to the issue of the gender perspective in the context of armed conflict and transitional and peacebuilding situations. However, we are aware that in progressing along this path, we are liable sometimes to duplicate the functions of other principal organs of the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, both of which have specific mandates to deal with these matters under the Charter.

In that light, further efforts should be made to ensure coordination and cooperation among the principal organs of the United Nations in order to tackle these issues in an holistic manner while avoiding overlaps in the mandates and functions of each organ.

Thus, in El Salvador's view, the special position of the Peacebuilding Commission, deriving from its organic link with the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, make it, in a way, the proper forum for promoting and assessing on the ground the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) in a broad-based and holistic manner.

In concluding, allow me to restate the political will of the Government of El Salvador to continue making progress in the promotion and implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and in strengthening the political participation of women in decision-making processes which will ensure that women become active players in their own development.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tonga.

Mr. Tupouniua (Tonga): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific small island developing

States, comprising Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, the Kingdom of Tonga.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your strong leadership in convening this open debate. We share the concerns raised in the presidential statement of October 2007 (S/PRST/2007/40), wherein the Security Council condemned all acts of gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict committed against women and girls, including killing, maiming, and sexual violence and abuse. We commend the work that Security Council has done in addressing gender-based violence with the adoption of resolutions 1325 (2000) and with the more recent adoption of resolutions 1468 (2003), 1493 (2003) and 1590 (2005).

Gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict is a violation of women's basic human rights. It is also a concern raised by the Secretary-General in his report containing an in-depth study on all forms of violence against women published in 2006 (A/61/122/Add.1). The report recognized that there are many forms and manifestations of violence against women in a wide range of settings, including the family, the community, State custody and institutions, armed conflict and refugee and internally displaced persons situations. The Secretary-General emphasized that

> "violence constitutes a continuum across the lifespan of women, it cuts across both the public and the private sphere and one form of violence often reinforces another." (*A/61/122/Add.1, para. 365*)

What we are seeing in some parts of the world is the use of rape and sexual assault as systematic war tactics in destroying the cohesion of communities. In some cases, women who were raped or sexually assaulted during situations of armed conflict face rejection by their families and communities. They are often ostracized and left to fend for themselves. These women face debilitating poverty and discrimination, and many subsequently fall into the vicious cycle of further exploitation and abuse by working in the sex trade; many are exposed to the danger of human trafficking.

In the light of women caught in situations of armed conflict, we urge the Security Council to recognize gender-based violence as a threat to the maintenance of international peace and security. We recommend that, where appropriate, the Security Council systematically monitor incidents of gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict. Furthermore, we recommend that, where appropriate, the Secretary-General systematically include comprehensive information on gender-based violence in his reports on conflict-affected situations and that he prepare a special report to the Security Council with timely information on sexual and gender-based violence, thereby initiating the process of follow-up for the Security Council and United Nations agencies.

We congratulate the sponsoring countries for taking the initiative to put forth today's draft resolution, which reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding and highlights the fact that violence, intimidation and discrimination may erode women's legitimacy and their capacity to participate in post-conflict public life, reconciliation and post-conflict peacebuilding processes.

In our efforts to support the victims of sexual and gender-based violence, we must provide women with psychological care to help them achieve long-term stability.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance of taking a preventive attitude towards sexual and gender-based violence and other factors that may endanger the security of women. Sexual and gender-based violence does not occur in a vacuum. Unfavourable political, social, cultural, economic and environmental exerts pressure and therefore reinforce existing vulnerabilities and gender inequalities.

It is important for the Security Council to address cross-cutting issues such as climate change in relation to women's security. Climate change is an emerging cross-cutting issue with serious security implications. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its fourth assessment report, highlights the vulnerabilities of developing countries and states that poor communities are especially vulnerable due to limited adaptive capacities and are more dependent on climate-sensitive resources.

Women and children account for an estimated 70 per cent of the world's poorest population. Women in developing countries are responsible for an estimated 45 to 80 per cent of household food production. Women are arguably much more dependent upon agriculture for their livelihoods and survival. Thus far, the effects of climate change are mostly likely to erode women's capacity to provide for themselves and their families, due to the loss of their livelihoods.

It is important to recognize gender differences not just in terms of differential vulnerability but also as differential capacity to adapt and to mitigate the effects of climate change. Climate change is not gender-neutral; rather, gender is an important determinant in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The lack of provisions for integrating a gender perspective into adaptation and mitigation strategies will seriously threaten the security of women. Women need to be empowered economically and must receive training and capacity-building to better adapt to the effects of climate change. It is also imperative to increase grassroots assistance to women in their efforts to preserve their livelihoods.

The link between climate change, the security of women and gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict is closer than one would expect. The developing world is facing more exogenous threats and risk factors than ever before. During the Food Security Forum in April this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization warned that long-term food insecurity would lead to the chronic undernourishment of the world's poor. An estimated 850 million people worldwide suffer from hunger, and the number is likely to increase by 4 million each year. Experts at the Forum cautioned that without proper mitigation and adaptation strategies and resources to implement such strategies, many developing countries will see their coping capacity diminish over time. The loss of arable land, the increased frequency of natural disasters, weakened infrastructure, increases in epidemic diseases, population displacements, the increase in poverty and competition for natural resources are drivers of conflict.

Since nearly one third of the world's poorest population live in countries that are fragile or conflict-affected, they will also be the ones most likely to be affected by or to engage in resource wars — armed conflicts over the use of natural resources, including oil, water and arable land. In a recent interview, António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, reinforced the likelihood of the situation as he explained that climate change could also uproot people by provoking armed conflicts over increasingly scarce resources.

Such conflicts will have a devastating impact on developing countries, and it is very likely that women will be exposed to physical and psychological harm and sexual and gender-based violence. We therefore urge the Security Council to take a preventive approach in dealing with sexual and gender-based violence by considering climate change as a threat to women's security and to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Mr. Prica (Bosnia and Herzegovina): At the outset, let me commend you, Mr. President, for organizing this open debate on such an important issue as women and peace and security.

My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement already delivered by the Permanent Representative of Slovenia on behalf of European Union. At the same time, I would like to add some points reflecting our own national activities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina recognizes the importance of resolution 1325 (2000) and will continue to work towards its full implementation. We welcome the advances that have been made in this area by the United Nations system and Member States since the historic adoption of the resolution, eight years ago. Generally speaking, we can clearly see from the Secretary-General's reports that the United Nations has supported the systematization and institutionalization of efforts to strengthen action in solving the gender problem; but the work is still far from done. We have to ensure that the provisions of resolution 1325 (2000) are implemented completely and that women can fully participate at all levels of decision-making. We must also strengthen the status of women in all fields.

We are very concerned at the fact that systematic sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflicts has been, and still is, used as a war strategy and that it remains a direct threat to international peace and security. Speaking from our own experience from the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly condemns all acts of violence against women and girls in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations. From the very beginning, therefore, Bosnia and Herzegovina sponsored and supported General Assembly resolution 62/134, entitled "Eliminating rape and other forms of sexual violence in all their manifestations, including in conflict and related situations", which was adopted on 18 December 2007.

Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomes the Secretary-General's initiative to launch a multi-year global campaign with the goal of bringing together the United Nations, Governments and civil society to end violence against women.

Two years ago, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a five-year gender action plan incorporating the main provisions of resolution 1325 (2000). Much has been achieved in the area of adopting appropriate legislation on the protection of civilian victims of war. The law now gives women victims the status of civilian victims of war and helps them on their path towards full reintegration into the community, giving them a chance for professional improvement and providing them with monthly allowances and medical and psycho-social assistance. Under the plan, expert teams have been established to engage in analysis, provide legal assistance to victims and conduct workshops on the basis of, among other things, sharing lessons learned.

In addition to the Government's activities, the non-governmental sector is successfully involved in improving the situation regarding the issue. A very good example is that of a project carried out by the non-governmental sector that has established a database of women victims in my country. In spite of society's traditional attitude towards women victims, 3,000 women have already been inscribed on this database, which remains open. Privacy is guaranteed, and all women were granted long-term financial aid.

Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly believes that women should be more involved in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding in post-conflict situations and the promotion of sustainable peace. However, women still need considerable support and capacity-building to be effective in today's society, which traditionally has been dominated by men.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina's full commitment to close cooperation with the States Members of the United Nations in the comprehensive implementation of resolution 1325 (2000).

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union.

Mr. Lamamra: On behalf of the Commission of the African Union (AU), I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to join previous speakers in commending the United States presidency of the Council and Secretary Rice for organizing this open debate on the crucial question of women and peace and security.

I wish to say how honoured I am to address a formal meeting of the Council for the first time in my new capacity as the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security. Indeed, I feel fortunate that I am assuming office in a climate of increasing cooperation between the African Union and the United Nations, and with the Security Council in particular. I am confident that we will continue to strengthen our relations as we move forward.

The protection and empowerment of women is indeed one of the founding principles of the African Union, as enshrined in our Constitutive Act, the Protocol on the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council and other instruments of the African Union. As Council members are aware, the Adoption of the protocol on the rights of women to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and of the declaration on gender equality, adopted following the historic presidential debate of the Assembly of the African Union in 2005, were important milestones in that respect.

A clear vision and mandate on the issue of women and peace and security in the continent have thus been established in the African Union, which stresses gender parity at all levels of our organization. We continue to develop the necessary instruments and the operational environment for their implementation, as an integral part of our overall agenda for a peaceful, united and prosperous Africa.

Furthermore, our regional economic communities, African women and civil society organizations have been the driving forces behind our efforts and achievements, and we are committed to continue to strengthen efforts towards addressing the well-known range of challenges of peace and security for women and for our peoples as a whole.

We therefore welcome the seriousness with which the Security Council continues to address this question, which also ranks high on the list of priorities of the African Union. In that connection, we have launched the preparatory process for the convening of an important conference on women in post-conflict reconstruction and development, to be held in 2009.

I would now like to focus on the theme of today's debate: on some of the opportunities and challenges which lie on the path ahead, from the peace and security perspective in particular.

First, we have been greatly honoured by the leadership and important contributions of women in recent peace processes in Africa, such as in Mozambique, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in ongoing efforts for lasting peace and security in the Sudan and Somalia. I should, however, like to underscore the need to strengthen the involvement of women in such processes in the future. Indeed, the efforts of the international community on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and related instruments have made possible a deeper understanding of the centrality of the gender perspective in the maintenance of international peace and security. The wide range of issues involved, such as the specific challenges facing women in armed conflict situations and sexual slavery and abuse, are now well known. We must take concrete actions in ensuring that the knowledge gained thus far is fully integrated in the new and emerging era of closer cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations for the maintenance of international peace and security. That includes the participation of women in peacekeeping operations at all levels. The coordination of efforts between the United Nations and the African Union would be crucial in that aspect.

Secondly, we in the African Union face the challenge of ensuring that our emerging peace and security architecture, which includes the African standby force, the Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise and our subregional arrangements for peace and security, adequately reflect our vision on women and peace and security. We are determined to address this challenge and continue to count on the support of the Security Council and our international partners in that respect.

Furthermore, the ongoing efforts for the reform of United Nations, and of Security Council in particular, also offer an excellent opportunity to address this crucial question, through adequate representation and participation of regions, such as Africa, that are facing serious peace and security challenges for women and for their nations as a whole, due to persistent conflict situations. We also believe that the elevation of the United Nations mandate on gender equality to the highest possible level within the Secretariat could be a major step towards addressing the issue of gender equality as a whole, and we call on the Security Council to encourage the efforts of the Secretary-General on this question.

Finally, as part of ongoing efforts towards strengthening the mobilization of resources and support for international peace and security, I would like to underscore the importance of ensuring that efforts centred on women and peace and security are adequately supported by the entire international community.

With those few remarks, I wish to reiterate the commitment of the African Union to our cooperation with the United Nations and with our international partners on this matter and other questions, and I wish every success for this timely and important open debate.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Than Swe (Myanmar): I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to take part in today's open debate. The issues of women and of peace and security are issues of particular importance for my country.

The need to prevent armed conflict and to bring to a speedy conclusion situations of armed conflict cannot be overemphasized. Resolution 1325 (2000) calls for all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of sexual abuses and to end impunity whenever such dastardly crimes are perpetrated. In situations of armed conflict, the most vulnerable among the population include women and girls. Therefore, we firmly believe that tackling the root causes of conflict, which include disunity, poverty, socio-economic and gender inequality and underdevelopment, is extremely important.

Myanmar fully supports a zero-tolerance policy with regard to violence against women and girls. Myanmar's traditions, culture and values strongly favour our efforts to promote gender equality. They also contribute strongly to the Government's endeavours to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. In order to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, the Government established the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs in 1996 as a national mechanism to carry out the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In 2003, in order to comprehensively carry out the measures laid out by the National Committee, the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation was formed. One of the key areas actively dealt with by those organizations is violence against women.

My delegation has repeatedly stressed here that the best way to protect civilians, particularly women and children, in armed conflict is to put a speedy end to such conflict. We also believe that national reconciliation is the only way to end conflict in a speedy manner. My country experienced the devastating effects of an insurgency that raged in our country for over 40 years. It is only recently that, owing to the national reconciliation policy of my Government, we have emerged from a conflict situation and are able to put a virtual end to the insurgencies that had ravaged the country for so long.

Currently, 17 out of 18 major insurgent groups have come back to the legal fold. With regard to the remaining Karen National Union (KNU) insurgent group, its two main factions have opted for peace, leaving only a small remnant of the KNU and former narco-trafficking armed groups outside the legal fold. Peace and stability now prevail in almost all corners of Myanmar. That has resulted in significant improvements in the daily life of civilians, in particular women and children.

My delegation joins the rest of the international community in its condemnation, in the strongest terms, of all sexual and other forms of violence committed against civilians in armed conflict, particularly women and children. We must work together to prevent such violence. Here, I wish to stress the importance of avoiding the politicization of this important issue. Sexual violence as a weapon of war must be strongly condemned. In the same vein, fabricating allegations and using disinformation as a weapon of political pressure warrant strong condemnation.

My delegation therefore takes exception to the unfounded allegations regarding sexual violence levelled against the Myanmar armed forces. We categorically reject them. The allegations levelled at the Myanmar military come from groups associated with the insurgents. Failing in their attempt to topple the Government by force of arms, they have embarked upon a disinformation campaign by fabricating allegations. The Security Council has had first-hand experience showing that reports emanating from exiles are at variance with reality.

Rape is regarded by Myanmar people and Government as a most dastardly and abhorrent crime. Whenever such a crime is committed, we make sure that the full force of law is applied against the perpetrators. Whenever there are allegations, investigations are carried out by the authorities and organizations concerned, including the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation; where there were genuine cases, perpetrators were prosecuted and given sentences ranging from 10 years to life imprisonment.

Rape and any other form of sexual violence are unlawful in any circumstance and in all places. They are also an offense against the dignity and integrity of the victims. The international community, national Governments and the United Nations system must all work together to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to take this opportunity to convey to Ms. Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States, my sincere congratulations on her country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank her for having taken the initiative to organize this debate on a topic that is as important as it is topical and which calls for a response from the entire international community.

I also welcome the participation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and many ministers this morning. The active and involved participation in this debate of so many delegations of Member States reflects the primary interest that we all attach to issues of peace and security and to the central role of women in achieving this and in achieving the ideals of our universal organization. But it also highlights the role that we must play in order to promote women's rights in general and to protect and provide care for the victims of the horrors and brutalities of conflict in particular.

While it is understood today that the international community must make greater efforts to promote the status and rights of women and to take appropriate action in that context, even more so must we protect them during times of conflict. Violence against women is, by definition, a dehumanizing and unacceptable practice and an abject violation of basic human rights. Such practices must be fought and forcefully punished.

The efforts made to that end by the United Nations and its Member States can only be praised and encouraged. However, reports issued by the United Nations and its specialized agencies give us alarming statistics on the treatment of women and on their sufferings and call upon us to redouble our efforts to put an end, once and for all, to the violence and abuses committed against women. We should recall, in this context, that at the 2005 World Summit our heads of State or Government reaffirmed the importance of protecting civilians, particularly women, in conflict and post-conflict situations. They also emphasized the need to promote women's rights as an essential precondition for peace, security and development worldwide.

The international community possesses an impressive legal arsenal for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and for protecting them as a vital force in every society. It is thus up to us to ensure rigorous implementation of the provisions of the relevant international legal documents and instruments, and to ensure that women in our societies, particularly those affected by war and conflict, finally benefit from the protection and attention that they deserve in order to bring about lasting peace and stability in our world.

Today's debate makes it incumbent upon us to make a collective commitment to ensure that women, wherever they are, are no longer vulnerable, are no longer placed in an inferior position and are no longer exposed to discrimination, threats or terror. In this framework, our civilizations must choose to genuinely participate in the global move towards ensuring that women get the place and role that they deserve in today's societies as full-fledged citizens, partners benefiting from equal opportunities and holders of responsibilities in all sectors and at all levels. This is, of course, a blueprint for a civilized society where women are a guarantee of modernity, a vehicle for development, a guarantor of political stability, and especially a preventive security shield against any obscurantist and retrograde tendencies — in other words, the spearhead of a society mobilized for progress and prosperity.

That, in any case, was the path taken in promoting the status of women in Tunisia, launched immediately after Tunisia achieved its independence in 1956, with the adoption of a personal status code. This is one of the basic pillars of the new plan for our society that is being undertaken by independent Tunisia thanks in large part to the reformist revival brought to our country by President Ben Ali. The principle of gender equality under the law was thereby enshrined and women were given a position at the forefront of the social and political modernization of the country. This has secured the position of Tunisian women in political life, making them an essential component of society and an effective, genuine agent of progress and stability.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Benin.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): My delegation congratulates the United States of America on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are particularly pleased, Sir, to see you presiding over this public debate.

If there is one area where the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) leaves most to be desired, it is that of the many forms of unconscionable violence and abuse which parties to armed conflict continue to inflict against women and young girls. This situation is in complete contravention of international standards. The most heinous and most traumatizing form of abuse against women is sexual violence. The seriousness of this abominable phenomenon is multiplied when it is perpetrated on a large scale. But all of that still does not compare to the use of mass rape as a weapon of war or as an instrument for ethnic cleansing or outright genocide.

The international community must acquire the means to gain access to the lawless regions where such crimes are committed and must carry out investigations of reported cases. In this context, the Council should be able to order special operations, by virtue of the principle of the responsibility to protect, in order to establish and document the involvement of armed groups committing sexual violence against women. Such investigations would aim also to determine the nature and the scope of the action to be taken to put an end to these criminal practices.

Synergy should also be established between the activities of human rights advisers, where they are deployed, and the monitoring and information mechanism established within the framework of resolution 1612 (2005), which was initiated by my country, Benin. This mechanism has been proven itself: it has enabled us to identify the perpetrators of abuse against children in situations of armed conflict.

Strengthening the legal provisions to fight impunity would be of great use, because the credibility of these provisions could serve as a deterrent to the parties to conflict. The International Criminal Court has a crucial role to play in this context.

At the same time, we must put an end to the stigmatization of women who are victims of rape and give them back their dignity by organizing awareness-raising campaigns and by establishing structures for psychological rehabilitation. This type of assistance to victims and to communities affected by armed conflict should be taken into account in the mandates of peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

In general terms, protection against sexual violence is an essential aspect of protecting civilians. United Nations missions should analyse such violence in order to define the concrete measures that can be taken to prevent sexual attacks. It nearly goes without saying that the deployment of women in the contingents would make the fight against sexual violence more effective because it could facilitate contact and the gathering of sensitive information. But the absence of women in these contingents should not impede the development of effective strategies to counter this phenomenon.

While amnesty for warlords is often the price to pay in concluding peace accords, it is important to ensure that serious crimes not be covered up, as long as they are properly documented. These crimes should be made imprescriptible worldwide so that those who are suspected of having committed such crimes may be brought to account as soon as possible in an international or national jurisdiction as appropriate.

That said, we must enhance the awareness of law enforcement agencies on the issue of sexual violence to ensure that they effectively protect the population, because it is not rare for all parties to an armed conflict to be guilty of serious crimes against civilian populations — who are just as fearful of Government forces as of rebel forces.

The fight against sexual exploitation attributed to members of peacekeeping operations must be intensified. We must act more preventively than we have by improving the awareness of contingent members before they are deployed.

Care for victims of sexual violence is best provided by women and by women's civil society organizations. They should regard this as a field of action in which they have a clear comparative advantage. Their participation in negotiations to conclude and implement peace accords and to establish truth and reconciliation bodies would be an additional guarantee of the mainstreaming of gender-specific issues. They could also help to ensure that effective prevention policies are adopted.

In this context, my delegation believes that it is entirely appropriate for the Security Council to adopt a resolution on this issue on the basis of the draft text (S/2008/403) circulated by the United States as part of the preparations for this public debate. This initiative, as a whole, has the support of my delegation.

Last year, it was an honour for Benin to have contributed to bringing about consensus in the General Assembly on the resolution on rape (General Assembly resolution 62/134) that was initiated by the United States. The Security Council's adoption of this new draft resolution will give the United Nations the tools to ensure better monitoring of zones of conflict with a view to better protecting civilians.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in French*): Owing to the lateness of the hour, I will be brief.

At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on having organized this important meeting on women and peace and security: sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. I would also like to congratulate the United States Secretary of State, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, and the other ministers for their outstanding statements and for having given them some of their time to this important debate. I would also like to thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the particular attention they are devoting to combating sexual violence against women in armed conflict.

The presence this morning of a great number of ministers from States members of the Security Council was a sign of the importance that the Council attaches to this issue, because sexual violence can, to varying degrees, pose a threat to international peace and security.

In this respect, I would add the voice of Mauritania to the chorus of those who have preceded us to condemn the degrading and inhuman treatment inflicted upon women through sexual violence committed in armed conflict. Despite all of the legal instruments — which Mauritania has ratified — and despite the actions and initiatives taken by the international community on the protection and advancement of women, we must note that much remains to be done. Women remain victims of the abominable practice that is sexual violence.

We are against all forms of violence against innocent civilian populations, all the more so when it is women who are the victims. Islam, our holy religion, orders us to cherish and protect women, who are after all the mother, the sister, the wife, the daughter — in short, those who are the dearest to us in human society. Sexual violence against women exposes society as a whole to serious dangers: early and unwanted pregnancies for many women, HIV/AIDS infection for mother and child, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the total demoralization of women victims, negative social repercussions for victims, and so on.

Statistics show that in recent armed conflicts it is civilian populations, that is to say non-combatants, who represent the majority of the victims. Women, who are the main targets of sexual violence in these conflicts, along with children, account for the greatest number of victims.

In this face of this shameful phenomenon, the international community should take all necessary measures to put an end to it and adopt mechanisms where zero-tolerance is required for perpetrators of these abominable crimes against women, crimes which, moreover, are not limited to a single region of the world.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women has done remarkable work, but the persistence of rape of women in armed conflict has reached a level that requires a strengthening of the capacities of the Office of the Special Rapporteur, particularly in human resources; here, women should be the focus of the choices that are made. That is why my delegation believes that the proposal made by the Minister for Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of Belgium to appoint a woman special investigator on sexual violence is appropriate as an effective means for eradicating this practice.

Women must also play an active role in peacekeeping operations. Such participation is currently limited; this is especially linked to language issues. To work for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur as a military adviser, it is not enough to speak two official languages of the United Nations. This linguistic obstacle must be overcome to allow women who have the qualifications and who speak at least two United Nations languages to apply for a post in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations if they wish.

The President: The last speaker on my list is the representative of San Marino, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Bodini (San Marino): I would like to thank the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, and you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting today.

Over the years, the Republic of San Marino has been a strong supporter of all campaigns against any type of violence against women. As President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Fiorenzo Stolfi, spearheaded the Council of Europe campaign against violence against women.

San Marino welcomes the now United Nations initiative on this subject initiated by the Secretary-General. In that context, we recently organized an event here at the United Nations, linking the work of the Council of Europe with the activities of this Organization.

I am happy to report that yesterday our parliament adopted a very comprehensive law against violence against women.

San Marino, a small country without an army, has been able to maintain its independence for more than 17 centuries. We condemn war and violence in general, but, more than anything else, we condemn violence against women and girls. Our women are the pillars of our society and of our families, and our families are the cornerstone of our society. Allowing violence against women destroys the very fabric of our society and all the dreams for our children's peaceful and prosperous future.

We are very proud to be among the sponsors of today's Security Council draft resolution on this very important matter.

The President: It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it (S/2008/403). Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, Russian Federation, South Africa, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Viet Nam

The President: There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1820 (2008).

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.55 p.m.